

Chapter Six

Life at the Lake 1921 - 1929

Herb's childhood, from age four up to his completion of grade school in 1929, forms the basis of this chapter. Understanding what his childhood was like at Lake Huntington may help explain, to some extent, why he enjoyed so much the peaceful village of Halcyon, which he would discover in 1936 (Chapter Nine).

Also, Herb's childhood was during the period of time often referred to as the "Roaring 20s." For the Lentz's on Lake Huntington life was good.

This was a period of economic prosperity, particularly in major cities. There was large scale development and use of automobiles, telephones, movies, radio, and electrical appliances. The nation saw rapid economic growth, and accelerated consumer demand.

The media focused on celebrities, especially sports heroes and movie stars. Jazz and dancing rose in popularity, the "flapper" redefined the modern look for women, and Art Deco peaked. The spirit of the Roaring 20s was marked by a general feeling of novelty associated with modernity and a break from tradition. Everything seemed feasible through modern technology.

Historic events of the 1920s

- 1920: The Prohibition Era began.
- 1920: Women's Suffrage was approved.
- 1925: Television was invented.
- 1927: Color movies were invented.
- 1928: Penicillin was discovered.
- 1929: The stock market crashed in October.

Returning to a Stepmother

Herb's father Henry married Mae Mahoney, an Irish Catholic, in May, 1921. Soon after that Herb returned to live with the family at Lake Huntington. We believe that Bernard graduated from high school this same year, so it is likely he would have returned to the lake as well.



Mary Eleanor Mahoney (Mae) was born March 21, 1891, in New York City. Mae was one of seven children of John Francis Mahoney (1863-1944) and Mary Jane Clancy (1859-1935), both born in Ireland.

John F Mahony, was a NYC Police Officer in the Brooklyn Bridge Precinct. The family lived in Brooklyn and Manhattan over the years.

Life at Lake Huntington

Herb wrote that he once lived in a village the size of Halcyon – and how it can be difficult to pass the time. (*November 1, 1937*). On board his ship he often sought out uncrowded places – e.g. writing a letter up on deck in spite of bad weather. (*September 17, 1937*)

From one of Herb's letters, describing Lake Huntington:

It's a pretty place in many ways. You have your green forests all around in the spring and summer, paths covered with pine needles to stroll down. In the fall all the leaves turn the colors of the rainbow and it's fun to go nut picking or hiking down some of the backwoods trails. In the winter comes sleigh riding, ice skating, and lots of snow. That's when the bed covers and the fire really feel welcome. Late winter and early spring with its slush, rain, and chilling March winds, is rather disagreeable; but that is when we could take an annual couple weeks visit down to N.Y.C. (April 17, 1938)

The Lentz Store and Residence

The early 1920s was an excellent time for Henry Lentz to have purchased a drug store on the shore of this resort lake. The increased economic activity of the Roaring 20s would have brought increased visitors to the resort town of Lake Huntington.

Herb said that in the building that was their home, the family lived upstairs and his father's drug store was downstairs. The building was built in 1880 with rock walls. It had a large porch around the front. There was a furnace in back. It had a cellar with supplies for the pharmacy.



Herb explained how in winter, the lake would freeze over with an ice layer of one to three feet thick. They would cut blocks of ice from the lake and haul to their store. They had a special bunker at the back of the store, filled with straw, where they put the ice to cool food and beverages for the store.

Electricity was not installed until Herb was about six years old, in 1923. In December of that year Henry installed a radio in the home and began selling radios in his store.

Herb's Half-Brothers

Henry and Mae soon added to the family with two more boys. Howard Arthur was born September 15, 1922 and Robert Henry was born December 9, 1924.



Above left photo shows Henry and Mae with baby Robert in the buggy.

Above right shows Mae with Howie, around 1926.

More About Henry B. Lentz

The following information was obtained from archives of the *Sullivan County Recorder* between 1921 and 1929. It appears that Henry was very involved in his community and he was well respected. Throughout the 1920s, Henry's store was used as a meeting place for organizations such as the Cochection Town Board, school district building committee, and fire prevention officials.

Henry also was a member of the Game Club (a hunting club), which had a membership of over 200. In December 1921, Henry was listed as one of the attendees for that year's annual banquet.

Henry's Civic Affairs

Lake Huntington School District Building Committee

In October 1922, there was a special meeting of the Lake Huntington school district, and Henry was chair of the meeting. At that meeting they unanimously voted to appropriate \$10,000 for acquisition of a new site and erect a new school building. In August 1923, there was a public notice that sets of plans and specs for building the new schoolhouse could be picked up by contractors from H.B. Lentz.

Justice of the Peace

Henry was elected to a position as one of the local Justices of the Peace. The first reference found in archives is from May, 1924. Two men involved in a fight over laying of a water line were required "to appear before Justice Henry Lentz."

In October 1925, Henry was nominated by the Democrats for the position of Justice of the Peace for the city of Cochection (which included Lake Huntington). In the November election he won a plurality of votes.

In October 1929, HB Lentz was one of three individuals nominated by the Democratic party for position of Justice in Cochection.

Lake Huntington Fire Official

At their annual meeting in April 1927, Henry was re-elected as Secretary. He was chosen again as Secretary in April 1928.

Representing Lake Huntington

In April 1923, "B.D. Calkins, H.B. Lentz and H. Schmidt made a business trip to Groton, NY as town officials."

In January 1925, Henry was selected to participate on the Grand Jury of Sullivan County.

In April 1929, Henry represented Lake Huntington as a member of a regional civic body of member communities: the Delaware Valley Association. It was a movement to promote community interests in the Delaware Valley (encompassing sections of four counties).

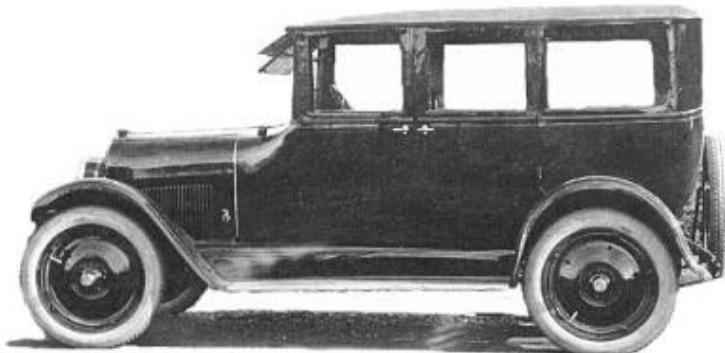
Family Stories About Henry B. Lentz

Lake Huntington was a small town, and the nearest doctor was 15 miles away. Herb told us that his father often handled medical emergencies. Our cousin Gert added that he was frequently referred to as "Doc."

Herb also told us that during the prohibition years his father offered to his favorite customers a "cherry tonic." During a recorded interview (1984) Herb said that as a pharmacist, his father was able to get 100 proof alcohol in five-gallon cans. He used that to make pints and quarts of "95 proof" cherry tonic.

Writing about that era, in his latest book Fareed Zakaria noted that "During prohibition, there were thought to be up to 100,000 speakeasies – illegal bars – in New York by the middle of the 1920s (page 97)."

In June 1923, Henry purchased a new Durant sedan; Herb was six years old.



Above is 1923 Durant Model A-22

Herb wrote in a letter to Louise that his father was "just like Fred" [Fred Whitney, Louise's step-father] – "He didn't like animals either."

He wrote that his dad was a good checkers player. His dad taught him to play it, and he had to get good at it to beat his father. (August 27, 1938)

Stories from Cousin Gert

My Dad [Howie Lentz] used to talk about his father [Henry Bernard Lentz] hitting his head on the dining room light hanging above the table. He said his mother [Mae] would yell "Henry!" It kind of became a running joke if

my father hit his head on our kitchen light, both my parents [Howie and Gertrude] would yell "Henry!"

Henry also used to make the Nazi salute and say "Heil Hitler", not because he was a sympathizer but because it got my Dad's mother [Mae] cranked up and she'd yell at him. Sounds like Henry had a sense of humor.

However, my mother [Gertrude] told me years ago that my Dad's mom [Mae] handed my father a pistol and told him to throw it as far as he could in the lake. Apparently, he did so. I'm not sure if this was after Henry's stroke or what the issue was. When I've visited the area, I look at the lake and wonder if there's a pistol down there under feet of lake silt.

Two Views of Mae Mahoney

Original Stories

All the stories that we remember from the time we were growing up, were that our dad hated his step mother because she was "such a strict Irish catholic." And he had not forgiven her for a very long time. This had been a big deal.

He lamented his "strict catholic upbringing," and said that eventually, many years later as an adult, he finally forgave her for being so mean to him.

It is interesting that later communications with family revealed that our Uncle Bob and Uncle Howie thought she was nice (she was their natural mother).

What Herb Wrote in His Letters about Mae

What's puzzling is that all of his letters to Louise (from 1937-1939) reveal a love and respect for his stepmother. He wrote very kindly and fondly of her as a young man in his early twenties.

Herb wrote that from the time he was four years old, when she became his step mom, until he was ten, he was unaware that she was not his real mother. He wrote that it made no difference – in fact, that "she had always been kind to me." He wrote that he owes to her any good characteristics he has. (November 9, 1937)

He confessed in one of his letters that he didn't know his mother's age, but said she is only about 12 years older than Bernard. Bernard called her "Mae," and Herb called her "mother." He wrote that when he was a kid, before he learned

she was his step-mother, he wondered why she was only 12 years older than Bernard. He wrote that not being told the facts until he was older made him “cold hearted and unemotional as far as relatives have always been concerned.”

In a letter (*December 31, 1938*) He expressed much positive sentiment toward his step mother. “One couldn’t help loving a mother like that.” He wrote in this letter that his mother thought a lot of him because he always tried to be the way she wanted him to be. “And she believes in me.”

A Perspective of Our Family

These were critical formative years for our dad. Understanding a person’s formative years can reveal clues as to behavior and attitudes exhibited later in life. I have found this to be the case for myself, as I have delved into my past, searching for how certain behaviors and attitudes on my part developed. Reading our dad’s letters has provided me a new perspective on how our father’s behavior and attitudes developed.

In turn, these revelations stimulate some degree of self-knowledge in the present day. One of the most disturbing emotions that we have dealt with in our family is anger. As this chapter unfolds, we have the opportunity to explore the genesis of this anger and the causes of violent or explosive behavior. This is not an easy thing to do. We may be able to see the linkages between our parents and us and what this means for our own children.

In an email discussion about where the anger in my father might have come from, Gert wrote:

I'm guessing it came from Henry although my father [Howie] was the exact opposite, he was very passive and one of his favorite sayings was "don't make waves." I can imagine my father was, as a child, much like he was as an adult, laying low and trying not to cause problems.

And I'm sure, as a stepmother, Mae had her own issues with your dad [Herb]. The Irish aren't known for "sparing the rod" and anything that might have upset her might've upset Henry.

My mom told me my father [Howie] confided in her that he was very depressed as a child and would stare at a blue vial in the pharmacy that contained what he knew to be poison while thinking of ingesting it. What was happening for him to think that? My father seemed just as depressed in adulthood frankly.

Daily Life for Young Herb At the Lake

About Pets

Herb wrote that Henry did not like animals or pets, but Mae liked animals a lot.

I was the one in my family who brought them home. I like it when you can have a pet for a long time. For a long while we'd keep losing every cat and dog we had, but finally I got a kitten that we had for a long time. I used to go fishing for it as it was crazy about fish. It was a funny kitten too. It used to like to suck on starched shirts. And it ate empty ice cream cones and liked them better than milk. I named it Patsy.



Above left: Howie, Herb, Bob, 1926. Above right: Herb, Howie, Bob, 1929

Cold Winters

One of the things that Herb remembered vividly, was how cold the weather was in winter. Through their letters (1937-1939), Louise and Herb sometimes wrote about going back east to visit their home towns. In one letter to Louise, Herb reiterated his discomfort going back east to "visit the snow." (November

22. 1937) Growing up, I recall them getting into arguments about visiting the snow. He hated the snow. He had unpleasant memories of shoveling snow – and walking to school in the snow. In another letter he recalled some nights that were even “four-blanket cold” and he would open the windows. “Zero too.” (August 27, 1938) He wrote how he used to sleep as a kid – how it upset his mother because he messed up his bed so – pulling covers, doubled up, to wrap himself with during the cold winters. (April 17, 1939)

Photos below are Howie and Bob



About School

Imagine a grade schooler, walking three-fourths of a mile to school, during the winter. Herb said it was occasionally bitterly cold, with snow on the ground. A funny anecdote is that we three children grew up hearing how Herb had to walk “five miles through the snow” to get to school every day, during the winter. When we actually visited Laker Huntington, back in 1996 We calculated the actual distance from their home to his school. It was only 7/10 of a mile.

In a paragraph about their perceptions of time, he wrote “When I was a kid I thought it dragged too because of the nine, long, hateful months of school each year.” (September 26, 1938)

In a letter (February 7, 1939) he wrote about his life 10 years ago. “That January [of 1929] I was all excited over the prospect of graduating from public school, which I did, and for the remainder of that term my presence at school was optional.”

Herb completed his “public school” years in January, 1929. That would have been the culmination of elementary school, through sixth grade, just before he turned twelve years old. Then in the fall he enrolled in the Junior High/High School in Narrowsburg.

He often spoke about how his Junior High/High School in Narrowsburg was a multi-graded school, and that allowed a student to advance as quickly as they were able. He was proud that he completed high school early.

Altar Boy in Catholic Church

In a letter (*October 3, 1937*) Herb wrote that he was an altar boy in a catholic church for ten years. In another letter (*December 11, 1939*) he wrote that he left Lake Huntington at age 15 (in 1932). This would mean he began as an altar boy when he was only five years old. Guidance today indicates the minimum age to become an altar boy is about eight years old.

Patty and I agreed, however, that it could have happened for Herb to become an altar boy at the age of five, in such a rural community. We know he was an exceptionally bright young man. Herb wrote that he was confirmed in the catholic religion was when he was 12 years old (1929). He was named “Francis” upon his confirmation.

Local Movie Theaters

For a perspective on daily life, in April of 1929 the first talking movies in the county were installed at a theater in Monticello. The theater in Jeffersonville had announced it would install talking movies within a few weeks. Each of these towns was about a ten-mile drive from Lake Huntington.

Herb's Stories of Fun and Misdemeanors

Shortly after he turned seven years old “Herb Lentz entertained quite a number of his little friends on his birthday anniversary. After games a delightful lunch was served the little folks.” (*Sullivan County Recorder March 13, 1924*)

Herb's start in politics perhaps began in 1924 or 1928. In a letter he wrote “When I was a little kid, I used to be a prejudiced Democrat and boy how I thought I hated Republicans. Around election time I used to hang up Democrat's signs with some kids I used to go to school with” (*November 20, 1937*).

He wrote (*April 17, 1938*) that he used to have so much fun around Easter when he was a kid. And he'd always get sick from eating too much chocolate candy. And his mother would always stick a handful of jellybeans in his lunch box to take to school.

He reminisced about his stepmother in one of his letters, and wrote that he used to be a pest and that he caused trouble for her. (*April 7, 1939*)

He wrote about a childhood incident. He and another kid "had a fight in a park over a cute little Irish girl." The other kid got two black eyes; Herb got a sore thumb and jaw. "And she got a date with some other fellow!" (*April 11, 1939*)

While responding to Louise's roller-skating mishaps, he wrote that when he was a kid, "when ice skating I used to run into people sometimes and see if I couldn't knock them down. (Brat, wasn't I?)" (*July 4, 1939*)

In a letter (*October 20, 1938*) Herb reminisced about life as a kid – how he caused trouble for his parents – but he had fun.

Ever since I can remember I've liked music like that [referring to classical music]. I can recall laying on a nice soft rug beside the Victrola, looking up at the ceiling; I can still remember the pictures on the walls, and I was about four or five then.

I can also remember things I'd like to forget. Yes, dear, I was quite a brat. I'd ruin anything I'd lay my hands on, so it was no wonder that Bernard kept his treasured and well cared for books and toys away from my destructive grasp. I'd pull the cat's tail; and lie, and take things.

But then my stepmother's influence started to change me, for she really brought me up right. Though she couldn't take the devil out of me.

Herb and His Younger Brothers

Herb wrote in a letter about his younger brothers. "The last I remembered of them was when they were in 1st or 2nd grade." (*August 13, 1938*) Checking dates with ages, and stories of events, Bob and Howie probably were in their primary grades, and the year Herb referred to was 1929. That was the year he completed "public school" (or sixth grade) and didn't have to attend for the balance of that school year.

The photos of the Lentz boys in this chapter indicate that they must have had a lot of fun together. There was only a five-year difference between Herb and Howie, and a seven-year difference between Herb and Bob.

During the reunion of 1984, Herb and his brother Bob reminisced. On the audio Herb says “I remember I used to box with you guys.” And Bob added “While you were on your knees.”



Herb with younger brother Howard (Herb is on the right in each photo).

Herb’s life would have changed markedly in 1929, with his starting junior high/high school in Narrowsburg, a ten-mile drive from Lake Huntington. His daily bus ride would take up much more time than he used to take walking to

elementary school. He would have made new friends in junior high/high school, and perhaps would spend less time and attention with his younger brothers.

Below in the middle, left to right are Bob, Herb and Howie.



Below (left to right) are Howie, friend, Herb, Bob, and friend.



What About Bernard?

Bernard attended high school in New York from 1917 to 1921. He studied Spanish in high school, and later traveled to Cuba. We know he came to Halcyon, California in 1930.

Where was Bernard between 1921 and 1930?

Is it likely that Bernard was still at home in the early 1920s? He would have been 18 to 21 years old.

At the time of the U.S. Census of 1925, the Lentz family at Lake Huntington consisted of Henry (49), Mae (30), Herb (8), Howard Arthur (2) and Robert (1). Bernard was not listed. He must have left home by the time he turned 21.

From Gert: *"I had the sense that Bernard left on bad terms. My father told me directly he was a communist (which he'd only know if he overheard it)."*

In a letter to Louise, Herb wrote that he had not seen Bernard at all from 1926 to 1936. "Before that I was just a little kid who used to tease Bernard a lot." Herb was about 9 years old when Bernard left home.

In the United States in the 1920s, during the Prohibition Era, large numbers of Americans flocked to Havana, Cuba. The night clubs were thriving. Bernard would have been at a prime age to join the thousands of other Americans headed to Cuba.

I'm guessing that it was around 1925 when Bernard went to Cuba, living and perhaps working there for three years. That was where he could have improved upon his Spanish language skills.

We learn from a public notice in a Brooklyn newspaper dated September 7, 1928: "Bernard Lentz, of 1287 Bushwick Ave, passed civil service quiz for Interpreter in Spanish." (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*)

In the 1930 Census, in New York, Bernard is listed as a "lodger" in a multi-family residence, along with three couples and a teenage boy. He lived at 2406 68th Road, Brooklyn, located in the neighborhood of Ridgewood. This was the same neighborhood where his father, Henry Lentz, owned a drug store and was active with the Ridgewood Park Board of Trade, just a decade earlier.

A Temple of the People obituary for Bernard included the following passage: "For many years he was employed with the Dept. of Defense. He studied Spanish in high school and spent three years in Cuba. He was a Temple member since 1933."

Herb's Resentment Toward Bernard

In a letter to Louise, Herb made reference to Bernard's decision at the time, in Halcyon, to not seek employment, but to try to get onto public assistance so he could devote his time to The Temple. (2/22/39)

Of us four boys, the one who always had everything he wanted; who was spoiled and given his own way; and never had to want for anything; he has done the least to ever help out any. 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. Ideals are all right – but even if a person isn't interested in their own welfare, they might at least do enough so that they could help someone else out.

Later that same year, in another letter (8/3/39), Herb wrote:

He is still acting the same about work as he did when he got out of high school. He used to get lots of help from Dad when the family had some money.

Uncle Bernard with Howie and Bob

Below are photos of Bernard with his youngest brothers. Although we are not certain, most likely the little boys are Howie and Bob. The one in the toy racer appears to be about three, and the other one appears to be around two. Just doing the math, it's likely that these little boys are Howie and Bob, around 1925. The photo could have been taken just before Bernard left for Cuba; according to Herb, in one of his letters, Bernard left home prior to 1926.



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