

Grandpa's Desk

I close my eyes and drift back over the chasm of time which has been my existence. The place of arrival is my boyhood home at Marshville, N.Y. The house sits close to the road on the south and almost too close to the creek bank on the north. Across the road a high wooded bank rises to obscure the south sun of winter. I was brought here to my grandfather's house in 1932 by my parents not long after my grandmother passed away. I was two years old. The house remained my home until I left at the age of eighteen. The occupants of this place at the time of my arrival were my grandfather Benjamin J. Garlock (my mother's father), and mother's nine year old brother Douglas Garlock. Even though the house is now long gone, it and its furnishings remain clearly etched in my mind. I'll shove the other material possessions back into the recesses of my mind and bring forth one special piece of furniture, my grandfather's slant top desk. Over the desk hung a large steel engraved picture of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. These days of the 1930's were tough times for America and Americans. The country was locked in a great depression. My father had lost what was considered a promising job at General Electric in Schenectady the year we moved to Marshville, NY. The job he got at Beech Nut in Canajoharie, the extremely thrifty bringing up that was instilled in both his family and my mother's, and the garden sustained the family in somewhat better stead than with some families. However there were still hard times that affected the family. Please excuse me from drifting away from Grandpa's desk, but the thought of its contents and the Declaration of Independence picture brought clearly to my mind the period of time during the mid to late 1930's when I became aware that there were hard times. The discussions as to whether the picture and some of the desk's contents could be sold to help grandpa Garlock with financial problems. In one drawer of the desk was the internal works of a watch. It was once housed in a gold case that had been sold to raise cash to help in a financial crunch.

I must at this point clearly state that grandpa's desk was strictly off limits to one small boy, namely me, unless Grandpa was there. I knew what was in the desk. Most things could be considered mileposts from my grandfather's life. I'd pester him to open these drawers and show me the large silver watch with the eagle on its cover. The watch had come from Cherry Valley and had once belonged to Smith Gordon who brought up my grandmother when her mother had died leaving her and her two infant sisters. That eagle aroused my interest and so did the thought that the watch had ticked away the years of the Civil War. A small pistol that had been grandpa's since he was young fired my imagination far beyond its actual importance.

One of the strangest things the desk contained was a U-shaped bone. On it was written "B.J.G." and "1887". Grandpa said it was the wishbone of his pet goose that had been the Thanksgiving dinner when he was ten years old. Another treasure that comes to mind is a small Christmas box of old coins including one small cent with an eagle on it that grandpa said was the kind of penny most used when he was a boy. The reminder of a happy day remained in grandpa's ticket to the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago for October 9, 1893. His father had taken him and two other boys that day. Grandpa was fourteen years old. Since his father had left the family when grandpa was very young, this was probably a special outing.

It would be nice if our lives were composed of only pleasant memories, but it cannot be. There in the pigeon holes in the old desk were papers that I did not understand until years later. The documents regarding the foreclosure when grandpa's sisters took the farm from him were there as were the papers about the fire that destroyed the farm barn. Sandwiched in with other documents were obituaries for grandmother in 1931 and his thirteen year old son who died in 1936. Such were the adversities fo life that my grandfather went through. Despite the hardships, he was a remarkable man and one of my great mentors and friends. Doubtless in preserving his treasures that were passed down to me, I acquired a depth of understanding of yesterday's life and began an accumulation of objects and memories that have been a great part of my life.

Skip Barshied

September, 2008