

THE WILLIAM AND JENNIE RHODES FAMILY

Before Jennie returned from Saranac Lake, Willy had built a house on the lot on Virginia Ave. which was part of the Rhodes home place. This lot had been deeded to him by his parents as a wedding gift¹. He built the house to the exact specifications set down by Jennie in her letters to him from New York². On 12 Aug 1917, William L. Rhodes and Jennie Belle Hughes were married³. They proceeded to set up housekeeping in this brand new house and with a brand new 1917 model T Ford automobile that they had purchased. Things went well for them, as Willy's job paid well. Being 38 years old, he was not called to duty in the First World War which was going on at that time.

On 28 Feb 1919, the first child, a boy was born to them. They named him Robert Lee⁴. On 12 Oct 1920 little Laura Bernadine was born into the household. Then on 16 Oct 1922 another little girl, Opal Virginia, was born to Willy and Jennie. By this time the economy of the country was beginning to suffer post war recession. The war had ended in 1918, and the former soldiers in the war began to be integrated into the work force. Willy's job was eliminated and he was assigned to the freight handling department again. At about that time, because of the economic conditions in Effingham, the Rhodes' began to think about looking for greener pastures. Since three of Jennie's sisters lived in and near Decatur, and Jennie herself had lived there before, they decided to move to Decatur which was a larger town and had more job opportunities.

In April of 1923 the Rhodes' sold their house⁵ in Effingham and moved to Decatur. At that time there were not many paved roads and many of the roads between Effingham and Decatur were plain old country dirt roads. At that time the distance, by road, was about 80 miles and took a half day to make the trip. The Rhodes family had a temporary place to live, in rented rooms next door to John and Myrtle Graff. Myrtle was Jennie's sister. Willy had obtained a job at McClelland's grocery wholesale house where John Graff worked as a deliveryman. Willy's job was Stock Clerk, which was somewhat akin to the clerk job he had at the railroad.

During the Fall of 1923 Willy and Jennie bought a house at 1718 N. Gulick avenue⁶, but the former owners did not move out until a couple of months later so they rented a vacant house next door, which belonged to the Orlando Floyd family, until they could move into the house which they had purchased. It was November or December when the family moved into their own house.

At that time, North Gulick Avenue was practically outside of the city. The 1700 block began at Olive Street at the south end and the north end dead ended at Grant street. There was a large pasture on the north side of Grant which ran west to east from Oakland Ave to Walnut Grove and extended north and south from Grant to Harrison Ave. A small herd of cows, belonging to the Hamilton's who ran a small dairy, were kept in the pasture. Oakland Ave. paralleled Gulick on the west and Walnut Grove was on the east. Except for a few larger old farm type houses in the neighborhood, most of the houses were fairly new bungalow type houses that were popular in the late teens and 1920's. Gulick and Walnut Grove were plain dirt streets and Oakland was oiled because it was a through road that led out into the countryside. Graceland Cemetery was on the west side of Oakland opposite the pasture that was at the end of Gulick. The area had electric power but there was no public water supply, sewerage or gas supply. Gradually as time passed City water and Gas became available, but no sewer was made available.

It was in this house and in this environment that the Rhodes Family lived until they moved to East Hickory Street in the fall of 1936; a total of 13 years. While there, several significant things happened to the family. One was the birth of their fourth child, a daughter, named Catherine Marie⁷. She was born on 3 Sep 1925 and was a healthy, happy little girl. However, her time on this earth was not to be long. In the spring of 1926 Catherine caught Whooping Cough, along with her older brother and sisters and in April 1926 she died from complications resulting from this disease⁸.

Not long after the Rhodes family moved into their North Gulick address, during the summer of 1925, Willy broke his right arm while cranking the family's 1917 model T Ford. It was a characteristic of these cars, that if the spark was advanced too far, they would "kick back", or start to run in the opposite direction to what they were supposed to. When this happened it sometimes broke the arm of the person who had hold of the crank. It was because of this incident that Willy and Jennie decided to buy a new model Ford which had a battery and a "self starter". So, now they had a new 1925 model T Ford touring car similar to the old 1917 model, except for the self starter.

His broken arm caused Willy to be laid up for several weeks and he could not go to work. When he became able to go back to work, he found that he had been replaced at McClelland's and was out of a job. Because of this there followed several weeks of job hunting. Eventually in the Fall of 1925 Willy found a job in the foundry at Mueller Co., a manufacturer of plumbing and brass fittings for the water and gas distribution industry.

Willy started his work at Mueller's as a "pot shaker" in the brass foundry. In this foundry the brass was melted in a "teapot" furnace and after the molten brass was raised to the proper temperature and liquified, two pot shakers would hold their pot or crucible under the spout of the furnace and the furnace operator would pour it full of molten metal. The crucible was held in a steel frame which had one handle on one side and a double handle on the other. The pot shakers would carry this pot full of metal at a run, so as not to let it cool too much, to the molding floor, where the molders had built up a series of molds, and they would pour the metal into the molds. The man on the double handle end did the pouring while the shank man held his end of the frame. The pot shakers would repeat this until the furnace was empty, then return to this chore when another furnace was ready.

Needless to say, this was a very physically demanding job, and Willy was not a very large muscular man. Eventually he was changed to the job of making up the metal mixture, consisting of brass ingots, brass chips from the machine shop, small portions of tin, lead and zinc to make the correct proportions and also some material to assist in making the molten metal mix well, called flux, and then hauling in a skid to the furnace and dumping it in to be melted. The type of brass used for Mueller fittings was red brass which is composed of 85 percent copper, and 5 percent each of tin, lead, and zinc. The brass was bought in ingots of a different composition and it was necessary to combine the ingots with other ingredients to result in the right mixture. The metal lab formulated the mixture and it was Willy's job to weigh out the different materials for the mixture. Willy remained in this job for nine years, when in the middle of the Great Depression, he was laid off indefinitely along with several other employees of the company.

In December 1929 Willy came down with appendicitis, and before anyone realized what was wrong with him the appendix had burst and he had a case of peritonitis, which in those days was usually fatal since there were no antibiotics to fight infections of that kind. Early in January, 1930, Willy went into surgery, and after a very difficult time he did pull through after being near death for several weeks. But, Willy was never very well after that. At the time of his sickness he was 52 years old and the infection had taken its toll.

At about the time Willy recovered from his sickness the great depression of the thirties began and the Rhodes family fell into financial difficulty. Jennie went to work as a laundress in the Wabash Hospital laundry, and for a while Willy continued to work at Mueller Co. but soon the Rhodes family, like thousands of other families throughout the country found it hard to make ends meet. Income from wages dropped drastically and working hours were reduced in effort to keep as many people working as possible.

Mueller Co. had compassion for their employees and even when sales dropped and the need for production was reduced to almost nothing, they entered into projects to improve their plant. Willy was transferred to the

maintenance dept. along with many other production workers, but by 1934 things were so bad that the company could no longer finance the plant improvement project so many of the employees were terminated, including Willy Rhodes.

By 1936, the Rhodes', who could not make the payments on their Gulick Street house, had lived out the equity and had to move into a rental property, so in September of 1936, they moved into a duplex at 1360 East Hickory Street. The other side of the house was occupied by Tony and Eleanor Brady. Eleanor, formerly Eleanor Dixon was Jennie's Niece. At that time Willy was working on WPA and Jennie was working in the Laundry at the Wabash Hospital. Since the rent was only \$10.00 per month the family managed to get by.

By the end of 1937 and into 1938 two of the Rhodes children, Robert and Laura Bernadine, were finished with High School, and the third, Opal, was only a couple of years from graduation, so the financial situation began to ease a little, even though the income had not appreciably increased. However this did allow the family to move to a single family dwelling which had a somewhat higher rent, but low enough that they could handle it. They moved into 1810 N. Morgan St., a rental property, in the spring of 1938, where they lived until the early September 1941.

By this time, Robert, who had been away at college during part of the years 1939 and 1940 was planning to marry. Willy and Jennie began to look for a more suitable house, and one that they could buy rather than rent. They found one at 979 W King St. and moved in Sep 1941. This is where they lived when Willy died on 31 Oct. 1952. Jennie continued to live there until in 1953 she decided to sell out and live in an apartment in Decatur in 1954. She left the Wabash Hospital and got a job at the Anna B. Millikin Home. On 3 Jun 1961 Jennie married Benjamin Trimby⁹. Ben was an old friend and he and Jennie had known each other since the days when they both had worked as domestics for a family named Shaw. Jennie then moved from her apartment and went to live in Ben's house north west of Decatur on the Boiling Springs Road. After living there a couple of years, they sold their place and bought a small house on N. Vine street in the north west edge of Decatur.

Jennie and Ben lived on Vine St. until Ben died in 1970. After Ben's death Jennie sold the Vine street property and moved to an apartment on west Prairie St. in Decatur. In 1974 Jennie began to want to live where she could have some companionship, so she applied to the Anna B. Millikin home and was accepted as a housekeeper. The Home originally was on Oakland Ave. just north of West Main. Later they built a new building on Union street between Macon street and Decatur street and this is where Jennie went to live. The address was 321 S. Union St. Jennie (Hughes, Rhodes) Trimby lived at the Anna B. Millikin Home for ten years until she died 1 Feb 1984 at the age of 92¹⁰.

Jennie enjoyed life there and made many friends. For several years she served as night matron, and this gave her a sense of responsibility which kept her going for so long. Eventually, however, her Arthritis prevented her from getting around very well and also in her last two years she had Cataract surgery which weakened her. Until the very end of her life she was alert and aware of everything that was going on around her. She died peacefully in Memorial Hospital in Decatur IL of congestive heart disease, and is interred beside her first husband in Graceland Cemetery, in Decatur IL.

1. Effingham Co. IL Deeds; Sarah and Enos Rhodes to William Rhodes, dated 8 May 1917: Original records in the Effingham Co IL County Clerks Office.

2. Information obtained by conversations between the writer and his mother.

3. Marriage License; William Lee Rhodes to Jennie Belle Hughes: Original record on file in the Macon Co. IL County Clerk's Office, Decatur IL.

4. Birth Certificate; Robert Lee Rhodes, dated 28 Feb 1919: Original record on file in the Effingham Co. IL County Clerk's Office.

5. Effingham Co. IL Deed; William L. Rhodes and Jennie B. Rhodes, his wife to Henry Cressman, Trustee, dated 2 Apr 1924: Original record on file in the Effingham Co. IL County Clerk's Office.

6. Macon Co. IL Deed; Ira Cahill and Lora Cahill, his wife to William L. And Jennie B. Rhodes, dated 10 Sep 1923: Original record filed in the Macon Co. County Clerk's Office, Decatur IL.

7. Birth Certificate; Catherine Marie Rhodes, dated 3 Sep 1925: Original record on file in the Macon Co. IL County Clerk's Office.

8. Death Certificate; Catherine Marie Rhodes, dated 21 Apr 1926: Original record on file in the Macon Co. IL County Clerk's Office.

9. Marriage License; Benjamin Trimby to Jennie Rhodes, dated 3 Jun 1961: Original record on file in the Macon Co. IL County Clerk's Office.

10. Death Certificate; Jennie Trimby, dated 4 Feb 1984; Original record on file in the Macon Co. IL County Clerk's Office.