

LESLIE A. and ELLA H. WARE

Leslie Ariel Ware, #4.3, my maternal grandfather, was a native of southern Vermont and was born on a farm in the town of Wilmington on May 10, 1861. The actual farm site was inundated in 1924 by the creation of Whitingham Reservoir; it was located two miles south of the town center of Wilmington, directly on the route of the Hoosac Tunnel & Wilmington Railroad. This line, narrow gauged in those days, was a main link with the world beyond. The Ware family used to flag the train as it came down from Mountain Mills, the next stop north.

My grandfather had two brothers, Fred, who died young at 12 or 13, and Charles M., who married three times and eventually became a local bank official. He was born May 10, 1855, according to an account left by my grandmother. The family were Baptists and had been farming people, no doubt for some generations back, wrestling a difficult livelihood from the rocky soil and inhospitable climate. In the 1930's I recall seeing the name "O.O.Ware" over a village store of some apparent maturity; O.O.Ware was a cousin.

I have little information on Leslie A. Ware's parents. His father, Charles B., was remembered by my mother as an elderly man who had lost his eyesight (cataracts?). She recalls him sitting in the kitchen preparing the vegetables, a job he was able to do when he could no longer see. Leslie's mother was similarly remembered as a peppy lady who at a fairly advanced age (about 70) enjoyed berry-picking in the more deserted areas near her home; when her family protested her pursuing this activity alone, she insisted she was all right -- in fact in the "prime of life."

My grandfather had only the benefit of local schooling, no high school, and his services were required on the farm until he was 21, according to the generally accepted custom. However, at the age of 21 or shortly thereafter, he was free to leave if he liked. So he did leave in about 1882 and came to New York City, no doubt in hopes of improving his lot in life. He obtained a job as a driver on a regular delivery route of H.B.Cushman's bakery. (This H.B.Cushman, also a Vermonter, was the original founder of the Cushman Bakery chain; it has since changed hands completely.) An interesting sidelight on H.B. as an employer -- once when my grandfather was ill and wanted the day off, H.B.'s reply was that his drivers worked one day after they were dead.

While working for Cushman, he met young Ella Hamilton, another employee, whom he married in 1887.

My grandmother, Ella Hamilton Ware, had been orphaned at the age of 17. By some arrangement or other, she went to live with a Miss Sarah Jane Avery while she worked during the day and attended night school. This arrangement was in force during the year 1882, at least. Miss Avery (b. 10/5/1828, d. 4/22/1897) was apparently a very fine person of high intelligence, however she had had few or no educational advantages. My grandmother was fond of her and no doubt grateful to her as well. She named her daughter, my mother, Hazel Avery Ware, in honor of her.

I believe my grandmother's first employment was with the Long Island Rail Road, but as mentioned, prior to 1887 when she married my grandfather, she was employed by Cushman's Bakery. At the very first, the young couple

LESLIE A. WARE and ELLA H. WARE (Continued)

lived in Brooklyn, but shortly they moved to Harlem, which in those days was a modest though eminently respectable residential area of Manhattan.

The couple had three children: Hamilton Ralph, born on 3/2/1888 -- just prior to the famous "great blizzard of '88", incidentally --, Hazel Avery (#3.2), my mother, b. 2/24/1892, Rosalind Lucille, b. 6/17/1899. The Ware family lived among other places in an apartment up over a bakery which my grandfather by then owned at 2268 Seventh Avenue, between 133rd and 134th Streets. Later my grandfather lost this business of his own.

The family did quite a lot of moving into and out of various apartments. My mother recalled as a young girl wondering why they moved to some of the places, since they seemed to her no improvement over the previous one(s). Needless to say, her opinions were not sought.

My grandmother, Ella, was extremely ambitious, and she made many plans. She also had three children to look after, so she was unable to carry out a number of these plans, a situation which no doubt contributed to considerable personal frustration. She was a fairly good business woman, more capable along these lines than was my grandfather, and this caused frustration within the family. Furthermore, her personality was never noted for sunniness or sense of humor. For that matter, she had what was sometimes known in the family as the "Hamilton disposition." For some reason, she had a lifelong feeling of inferiority regarding her birth in Ireland, as if it were unacceptable socially, and she avoided reference to it.

The Wares lived at 2268 Seventh Avenue for quite a long time, next in one or two other places, and then around 1906 or 1907 they moved for a while to 6 West 107th St., near Central Park West, which was very pleasant. My grandfather was then in business with a Mr. Coy in a location on nearby Columbus Avenue. This ended, possibly with Mr. Coy selling out, and they returned to Harlem, this time to 2148 Seventh Avenue.

About this time, my grandfather was associated in business with one Frank P. Hill (known as the Hill-Ware Company). They had a large store at 310 Lenox Avenue near 125th Street, with a lunchroom attached.

One of my grandfather's chief interests in life was church activity involving the Baptist Church of the Redeemer. My grandmother went along with these activities, but with less real devotion to them. The church building at this time was located on 131st Street, between Seventh and Lenox Avenues. It had been there for many years, but it was eventually sold to a Jewish congregation since more and more people of that faith were moving into the area. To house its activities, the church around 1909 or 1910 bought a four-story apartment house on the south side of 135th Street, between Seventh and Lenox Avenues. The church congregation met for worship on the first floor; the minister and his family, or rather a succession of ministers and their families, lived on the second floor; the Ware family lived on the third and fourth floors. This is reported by my mother to have been an extremely cozy arrangement. My grandmother also arranged at this time that my mother, at her quite youthful age, would play the pipe organ for the church. These somewhat unusual living arrangements continued for several years, and, as my mother reports, "They got to know the ministers

LESLIE A. WARE and ELLA H. WARE (continued)

awfully well."

For a period of about 4 or 5 years about 1905 to 1910, the Wares owned a summer home, "Fir Ridge", in Vermont. This was actually an old Vermont farm house in Wilmington, on the road to Whitingham, that was no doubt acquired very inexpensively. My grandfather would come up on the train week-ends, while grandmother and the two girls, Hazel and Rosalind, would spend the summer there. (Young Ralph, older than his sisters, was elsewhere -- possibly in the west at that time.) The summer home turned out to be really not particularly successful, so far as my grandmother was concerned, because of course she still had meals to prepare although in Vermont the facilities she had to work with were less adequate than back in the city. She had some sort of idea at the start that they would be able to make use of stale bread and similar items from the bakery, but this did not work out very satisfactorily. After a few years, the place was disposed of.

While they had it, my grandmother -- as visiting lady from the big city -- used to try to arrange an annual party for the children from the farms around. This generous gesture may have been reinforced by the idea of playing the Lady Bountiful, but my mother recalls these parties as being quite awkward indeed. Any degree of communication between the city and country kids was difficult, and the backgrounds, upbringing, and education levels were quite divergent.

Back in New York, the Church of the Redeemer moved just out of the city to Yonkers, uniting with another existing congregation about 1912. For a while thereafter the family attended a church in Washington Heights at 145th Street and Convent Avenue, walking up from 135th Street.

In 1917, however, the Wares bought a substantial frame home in Yonkers, just north of the Bronx city line at 52 Elinor Place. This 3-story house (originally the third floor had been servants' quarters) was perched on a rocky outcropping, among cherry trees high above the street. Originally it had a fine view over into Van Courtlandt Park. Unfortunately, not many years later a row of brick apartment buildings erected in a solid wall along Caryl Avenue blocked this view completely. This, in those days, was suburban living. Commuting into Manhattan required a walk "over to the street," Broadway, a street-car ride south of 20 blocks, and catching the IRT subway at the end of the line at 242nd Street and Broadway. My grandparents made many good friends in Yonkers; the B.A. Cushmans (he was a distant relative of old H.B., my grandfather's original New York employer) lived right next door, and the two families were very close. Other friends were the Philips, the Howlands, and the Hills. I know of these principally because of my mother's and aunt's friendships with their own contemporaries, the children of these families.

Both my grandparents ended their days in this home -- my grandmother on May 22, 1934, after a progressively confining illness of multiple sclerosis, my grandfather 17 months later on October 5, 1935, of cancer. They are interred in the Ware family plot in Kensico Cemetery, Valhalla (Westchester County), New York.

--WML, jr.
June, '68