

William M. Treimer

By Grandson, William Treimer

I was born on February 6, 1886, in Dixon, Iowa, not far from Davenport. My parents, August and Sophia Treimer, had emigrated from Germany shortly before my birth. I was the fifth of their eleven children, with four sisters and six brothers. After elementary school, I worked as a farm hand for a neighbor and also for my brother-in-law. By 1904, I had saved \$800, enough to leave the farm and pay for my education. I attended Brown's Business College in Davenport.

During school vacations, I sold industrial policies for Guarantee Life Insurance Company in Davenport. I recall being quite happy when my first prospect was not at home. I learned a few things about the insurance business from the experience, but I never did like door-to-door sales very much.

In 1905, after graduating with a degree in typing, shorthand, and bookkeeping, I worked as an official stenographer in the freight office for C.B. & Q Railway in Moline. In 1909, I obtained a job in the manager's office at Standard Oil Company in Davenport as their head stenographer.

I married Emma Krebs on September 21, 1910, in Davenport, Iowa. Emma was the perfect match for me. She was as quiet and calm as I was headstrong and ambitious.

We moved to Hartley in 1912, as Emma had other family members in the area. Her father purchased 80 acres for her and for each of her sisters. We started farming just north of Hartley, and later bought additional land. Our farmhouse was a large, stone structure with big porches. I was what you might call a "Gentleman Farmer." With a man hired to do the farming, I pursued other business interests as well getting involved in politics.

My first political experience was to run for Hartley Township Assessor in the fall of 1912. I was not well known in the area at that time, and as a staunch Democrat in a Republican area, I was defeated. Even though I had known that I may not win, it was hard to lose the election.

We had four sons: Wilbert, Wayne, Virgil, and Donald. The three older boys helped on the farm—somewhat. They milked the cows but spent most of the time shooting milk into the cat's mouths. They tended to gamble to see which one of them had to do the chores that day. They tended to gamble about everything! Donald came along later and by that time, Emma and I were too old to corral him. He was on the move from sunup to sundown.

All of my sons served in the military. Wayne was a bomber pilot and was shot down in WWII. He could have parachuted to safety but chose to stay with the plane to help the others. His body was never recovered, but his headstone is nearby. I was proud of his sacrifice, but very sad when we found out he wouldn't be coming home. My three remaining sons all followed me in the insurance business.

I had started Treimer's Insurance Agency in 1915, working on a card table in the parlor of our home. I also became a director of O'Brien County Mutual that year.

We eventually moved into Hartley, first to the Goosy place on East Maple Drive, then to 216 West Maple Drive. I liked to play pinochle with my friends and poker with my sons and their college buddies. I was a member of the Masonic Lodge in Hartley. I always liked to drive a nice car, mostly Buicks. Though I always wanted a Cadillac, I never owned one.

I was known to have a gruff voice and frankly, I was quite self-confident. Like many German men, I liked to argue with my friends and most likely it sounded as if we were going to start swinging any minute. Of course, when the argument was over we were all the best of friends again. That was just my way.

We worked long hours in those days, Monday through Saturday including Wednesday and Saturday nights. We played hard too, and I was known to entertain a business associate by taking a bottle out of the vault and sending someone over to Red's café for some ice cubes.

I was gifted in business and at recognizing opportunities. I also knew the value of friends in business, and became close to many of Iowa's most important insurance executives. They gave me much encouragement and support.

I served as a director of IMT Insurance Company from 1923 to 1957. Years later, my son, Wilbert, would become president of that same company. I was a founder of Allied Insurance Company in 1929, and served on the original board of directors as Vice President.

In 1923, I became Secretary of O'Brien County Mutual, and held that position until 1957. During that time, I pioneered the idea of providing fire trucks to area towns. O'Brien County Mutual was the only County Mutual to do so, and as such we had very good fire protection and fewer losses. I always believed in rewarding the firemen. The Mutual even paid for damage to the firemen's clothing worn to the fire, and held a special thank-you supper for one-half of the firemen each year.

Among my many other interests, I was Board Secretary of Hartley Independent School District from 1923 – 1950.

I was elected to two terms as an Iowa State Representative from 1932 to 1936. It was very difficult to win as a Democrat in those days, but by that time, I was known as a successful businessman in the area, and seemed to be well-liked.

The Iowa State Corn Husking Contest was held on our farm on October 30, 1941. Over 30,000 people attended including Governor George Wilson. There were marching bands including one from Gillett Grove that had a cornet player, Doris Salton. She and Virgil didn't notice each other that day. She was just a face in the crowd.

Many years later, Doris was preparing to move to Chicago to work for the Federal Reserve. Because of severe storms in the Hartley area, I needed some extra help with paper work on the claims. Someone suggested I contact Doris Salton. She agreed to work for me on a temporary basis. Before long, Virgil asked her out; she never did move to Chicago, but stayed on in Hartley and married my son.

In 1947, along with Sam Liebsohm, Bill Ennis, Clinton Cooper, and local veterinarian, Dr. Paulsen, I participated in developing Breezy Heights at Lake Okoboji. Developing the area provided a way for us to afford cottages for our families.

It was Donald's duty to maintain the lawn at the lake. He kept it mowed and mulched around the trees with cobs. He also raked the seaweed off of the beach, and never complained once about all the hard work.

I was fascinated by the uses of the corn cob. They were plentiful and I used them as mulch for the many trees I planted. We partially heated our farm house with cobs. While entertaining at the lake, I experimented with trying to grill, using cobs as fuel. It was a disaster, and the party ended up moving to the nearby High Point Hacienda.

I wore a suit every day, even at the lake. I loved to fish, and when I did, I just removed my suit coat and fished in a white shirt and necktie. I guess people thought that was pretty funny.

*In 1936, my friend, Rev. A. C. Weber, asked me to help with the purchase of Okoboji lake property for the Walther League Camp, now called Camp Okoboji. I was glad to help out.

When television sets became available, I was the proud owner of one of the first sets in Hartley. I had a tall tower installed beside the house and spent hours trying to get the knobs lined up enough to get a watchable picture. I rarely got much more than snowy lines.

I never retired, but toward the end of my life, I suffered from a great deal of stomach pain. Dr. Peterson did all he could for my stomach cancer, but in those days, there wasn't much anyone could do. I died in the hospital in Rochester, Minnesota in 1957, at age 71. I guess I smoked too much.

Emma died in 1985, at the age of 97, and is buried at my side.

Thank you for listening.

* The camp was originally built for CCC workers. When that program ended, the site was offered for sale. There was major controversy about such a large expenditure among LCMS Lutherans in Iowa District West. An attendee of the final meeting recalls quite a lot of shouting. Those in favor persevered and the camp was purchased for \$15,000. In 1985, a plaque commemorating the event was hung in Camp Okoboji's Fellowship Hall. It states—*In Thanks And Praise To God, We Honor These Men, Whose Hearts Were Stirred And Spirits Moved In March, 1936 To Purchase This Camp To The Glory*

Of The Kingdom Of God—Rev. A.C. Weber, Rev. C.G. Meyer, Alfred Sandersfeld, William Treimer—

“To God Be All Glory Forever.”