

A professor whom I knew at the University of Kansas came up from Coffeyville for his funeral, which was held at the house inasmuch as he never went to church. She said to me, "I have never seen such people. Where did they come from? They looked as though they had stepped straight out of the pages of a book." She said that she kept thinking they had come because they respected or loved him; that was apparent in their faces. But that she was so filled with curiosity concerning their lives that she could hardly attend to what was being said.

We had the Episcopalian vicar, and if you know the litany for the dead, it added to the picture, the brevity of the span of man and the way his life is filled with trouble.... Well, I have wandered pretty far afield, for I do not intend to include my father in this book at all. Perhaps some day I may. There was a bit of him in John Brandeis, but not much. But there was a oneness and a sameness in these other people, even though they were strictly individuals. The oneness and the sameness, I guess, was, rather, in their circumscribed lives. Circumscribed by time. Circumscribed by space.

They still seem unique to me, and to the members of my family, and the members of Earle's family. We often say to each other, "Surely such a collection never existed anywhere save in Liberty." Earle's mother died of cancer two years ago in the spring, and I went back to be with her during her last seven weeks. Her mind and memory were sharpened by illness and age, and we sat in her hospital room and talked about those people, and marveled, and rocked with laughter. She told me much that I had not heard, for she lived in the town and of course in a generation before mine.

So far as I know, no one has made use of any of this material except an elderly man by the name of Guy Williams, who is a columnist of the Omaha, Nebraska World-Herald. He left Liberty when I was very young and I do not remember him at all. Occasionally, my brother in Nebraska sends me the column, a kind of homey Burt McMurtrie type of thing; and Williams harks back to something that happened in Liberty and mentions familiar names. The town beauty, Ruth Smith; or old Red Martin, so named to distinguish him from Black Martin, who could lift a barrel and drink out of the bunghole; the town prostitute, Betty Harvey, who had a heart of solid gold; Randall James, the town pervert, who did magnificent fancy work; Charlie Ramey, whose cat grabbed his finger when he cut it off with a hatchet and ran underneath the wood shed; Billy Holland, whose wife periodically got religion and jumped out through the upstairs window (Don't ask me why)..... The six young blades who caught a freight out of town when Hazel Jackman appeared on the street, pregnant. Tom Smith, who used to boast that he was a friend of the notorious murderess Kate Bender. Of course Williams doesn't tell any of these stories in his column, just mentions the named in connection with his reminiscences about the Anti Horse Thief band or something.

Now I realize that it would be necessary to tie these stories together somehow; and so I wondered if I could use as a central character the easy-going, philosophical Pennsylvania Dutch merchant, who came into Liberty in 1876, hired ~~Kemper~~, the stone mason, to hand-hew native