

A LETTER HOME—JOHN WILBUR LAMBING

MARCH–APRIL, 1942

INTRODUCTION

John Wilbur Lambing was born and raised in Corry, Pennsylvania, a small town southeast of Erie. His father was a partner in a bedding company with his brother-in-law in Corry, but he died at a fairly young age of 58, and later, his mother at the age of 75. Wilbur, as he preferred to be called, was a traveling salesman of shoe leather and later life insurance.

Wilbur was a perennial bachelor who took care of his mother until her death in 1928. He became tired of the eastern climate and life in his hometown and decided to move west to San Diego, California, which he had visited while on a business trip before World War II.

The following is a letter he wrote to his family back east and discovered in the archives of Sam Wagner of Rochester, NY in 2016.

The time was World War II and Wilbur details his experiences in moving west, the people he met, and the initial few months between his arrival and finishing this letter. The letter was written to more than five families and was to be circulated among them in a prescribed sequence.

The typewritten letter was 14 pages long with narrow margins. Apparently, he wanted to use every inch of the paper that he had available. After all, there was a war going on.

The content of the letter that follows is exactly as he typed it. No changes have been made to grammar, spelling or punctuation. The font, Courier, was used to emulate what the letter looked like hand typewritten. A few photos have been added by me to add some color to the letter.

Wilbur continued to be bachelor until his passing in 1968 at the age of 77 in his beloved San Diego.

Enjoy the trip with Wilbur; I hope you find it as interesting and intimate as I did.

Charles A. Bliley

Charles A. Bliley
Rochester, NY
August 26, 2016



*John Wilbur Lambing
December 1943, Age 51*

Wilbur Lambing's Letter Home, May 1942

Box 1683
San Diego, Cal.
4-23-42

To my dearly beloved relatives,

I feel that each one of you would appreciate a personal letter from me, but it is simply impossible for me to find time to write each of you individually, and more than that, each time I relate the events which I will herein set forth, the less interesting it is for me to tell them again. So I am going to start this letter tonight for all of you, (and no telling when it will be finished) and will send it first to Uncle Frank and then it is to be mailed in succession to Gertrude and Henry, and then to Sam and Ada, and then to Gertrude Bliley Pancoast, 979 Whittier St., Akron, Ohio, and then to Miss Frances Lambing, Star Route, Apollo, Pa., and then to Mrs. Rose Coulter Wean, Elders Ridge, Edri, Pa. At that point, Rose, you can show it around to the family, not forgetting Blanche, and then let the letter die a natural death. I want to ask Uncle Frank to please contact Florence Gehrlein and let her read the letter to her folks, before starting it on its journey around the circuit. And I want to ask Gertrude Bliley to please step on the gas about forwarding it to Frances Lambing after reading it, and Frances, please let Mary and Ora read it but see that it doesn't go into permanent retirement before it gets up to Rose. Callie will also likely be Interested in it, Frances. All this sounds as though this were going to be an important document of some kind, which is not the case, but it will help me out a lot if each of you will follow instructions. I don't have to ask Sara to be prompt about getting it on its way because I know he wouldn't anyway, but Ada will, for she always attends to business matters on time. So, with all that preliminary matter off my mind, here goes.

It is difficult to know just where to start, but very likely the best place is at the beginning, As you all know full well, the desire to get to California to live has been uppermost in my mind for many years, it seems like many long years. And it was on a cold January morning of this year that I found the thermometer around the 20 below zero mark, and the wind blowing to beat the band, and the snow a mile high and deep, and decided to get up and make the selling of my homo the business of the day. It is a matter of well known record that by noon I had made the deal by practically giving the property away, taking a terrific beating so far as value was concerned, but at the same time accomplishing some other things that were all to the good so far as a ledger balance of my situation was concerned. I got out from under the mortgage which was up for renewal, at the time, so there were no more interest payments to make, no more taxes to pay, and no painting to be done this spring, no interior decorating to be done, etc. Then too, I had a very fine sale of my household goods, much better than expected, so I made up on the peanuts what I lost on the bananas. In addition to all that, it gave me an opportunity to pull out of a town where the one newspaper in it made life miserable for the local citizens who tried to contribute their time and energy and thought along constructive lines for the betterment of the community in which they lived and had their being. In addition to that, the yen to be on the go, to be in different places, to be meeting new persons and making more friends, was a perfectly natural thing for me when one considers my background of years ago when I traveled all over the country year in and year out.

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The story about the many interesting incidents connected with the sale of the household goods, most of you have heard before, so will not repeat it here---suffice it to say that It provided enough interesting material for a story all by itself. Then there was the parting with friends and lifetime associations. My many friends at home were more than kind to me, there were many parties, and lovely farewell gifts which I shall appreciate for many long years. It wasn't entirely an easy, off-hand sort of thing, to go around the town shaking hands and saying the really and truly final goodbye to those I loved so much. There were many times when it was difficult to keep the tears back, but I did pretty well, all things considered.

I had been a couple weeks getting things packed into my car, for there seemed to be so much stuff which I had reserved from the sale, not knowing exactly just what my situation would be on the west coast, and I wanted to keep some things just in case I might decide to keep house again. Finally, everything was in, and there wasn't enough room left to put even a clone or brunette in the front seat with me. My tires were good, for last fall I bought three new ones and a recapped tire, and there was a good spare, and an extra tube besides. So that was very fortunate for me. However, the spare tire was in the back of the car, and it meant a very bad situation if I should have a flat tire somewhere along the way, for then it would mean taking out all the boxes and bundles, setting them down along side the road in the mud or dust or snow or whatever it might be, and trying to get them put back again. So all the way across the continent, that was on my mind, but the good Lord was with me, and in the 3422 miles of the trip, there wasn't a bit of tire trouble or engine or car trouble, in any way. Inasmuch as the car was V-8 which had already travelled 40,500 miles when I traded for it in January, that was a remarkable performance. You will be interested to note that I average 18 1/2 miles per gallon, using 181 gallons which cost \$35.23. That was very fine when one considers the very heavy load in the car and the fact that a great deal of the driving was through mountainous country. So far as the cost of the trip was concerned, it wasn't too bad, for there was only one change of oil, and in most of the towns one was allowed to park the car on the street all night. The hotel rates were reasonable in some places and clear out of sight in others. But all in all, it wasn't too bad. However, I am getting ahead of my story, so better go back and begin at the point where I detoured.

As mentioned before, it had taken weeks to get all the packages and bundles stored away in the car to best advantage. It meant packing and repacking, turning bundles this way and that way, but at long last the task was done. I had spent the last few nights of my life in Corry in the Hotel Corry.

On March 3 there was one of our good old time blizzards, when, within a few hours, so much snow came down that all roads were blocked, and one could scarcely get out of their houses. The Highway Patrol had stopped all cars from leaving town, so there was nothing for me to do but wait around. On the following day, late in the afternoon they told me that it might be possible for me to



Hotel Corry, Post Card, C1930s

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get as far as Union City, so I decided to make the try. The sun was shining and a sort of peace and calm had descended upon the general scene when I walled across the road from my house or rather the house I had formerly owned, to say farewell to my neighbor. That over with, I go to into the car, took a long last look at the house, stepped on the gas, and the car gradually started forward, its nose pointed westward, to take me into an unknown future. I am ahead of my story just to the extent that the last active thing I did before leaving the house was to drive out to the cemetery to say goodbye to my family.

Owing to the very heavy snowstorm, it was not possible to drive to the grave, so I parked the car and waded over to the place where they were sleeping peacefully under the mantle of snow. The headstones were completely covered but well did I know where the place was, and I stood there a few moments in silent contemplation about a lot of things in life-- the why and wherefor of so many things, and as always, gave up trying to reason out a sensible answer. I wonder who will decorate their graves this summer.

It was a very rough journey to Erie, for 20 miles per hour was the best speed, with many waits for cars to pass here and there, but finally reached Uncle Frank's and Lula's grand home, where I remained until Saturday morning. In Erie I was very busy making a final cleanup of affairs at the offices of the two companies I represent, and saying goodbye to a lot of relatives and friends,----and there was a fine reunion of cousins at Uncle Frank's at which time Dawson Bliley showed several reels of his colored motion pictures which he had taken in Colorado and California. They were extremely beautiful and I enjoyed them very, vary much. Many thanks, Dawson, I want to express my thanks to both Uncle Frank and Lula for so kindly keeping me there for two or three days---I hope I wasn't too much bother.

On Saturday forenoon I started for Akron and arrived there late that afternoon and drove out to Gertrude Bliley Pancoast's house. I always like to stay with Gertrude for I have loved her muchly since I first knew her. This won't be any news to her when she reads it here because I have told her a thousand times no less over a long period of years. She has had a very hard row to hoe in life, but has ever kept her head high, her courage up, and carried on. The following day, Sunday, Gertrude went to church while I stayed at the house and pressed some clothes. Then I took her and her son Earl to dinner down town at a very lovely restaurant. Her other son, Wilbur, was in Cleveland at that time so couldn't be with us. After dinner we went out to Aunt Elizabeth's and found her to be in very good health, her age considered. Her daughter Elizabeth with the latter's husband, and two children live with Aunt Elizabeth, and they have a very nice home which always abounds in hospitality. From there we went over to Loretta's, but she and her husband William McShaffery were not there, so we missed seeing them for a visit although we did see the children.

Then, later in the day I drove to Canton, Ohio, where I visited my old friend Carl Spanagel and wife. Carl was in the leather business at the same time I was and I sold him many a bill of goods. He is now secretary of the Masonic Temple there and has a real job. I remained with them until Monday forenoon when I started for Indianapolis, arriving there that night. From there I later went to Chicago. In Indianapolis I not only had a fine time visiting former customers and friends, but had the privilege of going through the plant of the Kahn

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Tailoring Company. I have been wearing their clothing for years, and always have wanted to see how they make up the clothes in a big plant like that. I had an idea that they just took the measurements as they came in, in the mail, and then picked out a suit that had been already made up, and came as near to the measurements in the order as possible. I never was more wrong. I went through the entire plant, and saw every process from the time the woolens are received, inspected, shrunk, etc., until they come out as finished suits. About 500 suits a day are made, and every suit is made according to the individual order. It was a great eye-opener to me and I wouldn't have missed it for anything.



Kahn Tailoring Co., Indianapolis

In Chicago I found friends I hadn't see for 17 years, as well as having a short visit with my cousin Charlie Lambing and his wife Mayme. Charlie and Mayme have adopted a child three different times that means 3 different children, not the same one 3 times and two of them are now married, and the third little fellow is coming along fine. That is one of the finest things I have known anyone to do, and is the real essence of Christian living. They ought to have a gold medal when they reach heaven.

From Chicago I drove down to Joliet. Joliet is famed for its large penitentiary and it happens that they have a very large and fine High School near the depot, so in order that tourists and visitors won't confuse the two, they have a very large sign on the latter denoting that it is the High School. One of my Father's most intimate friends of boyhood days lives in Joliet, so I made a special visit there and had a grand time. His name is Will Wray, and he originally came from Spring Church, Pa., which is just a couple houses and a fence post several miles from Apollo, Pa. He was overjoyed to see me, and I had a grand visit with him and has two daughters, Louise and Esther. There are two other daughters who live in other towns. Mrs. Tray, a grand old soul, passed away some years ago, and Heaven was enriched thereby, for she was the salt of the Earth. From Joliet I drove on in the rain and darkness until I reached Davenport. It had been my plan to drive as little at night as possible owing to the trouble I would be in should a flat tire develop, but this night was an exception because I wanted to see a man in Davenport who was from Erie and formerly an agent for my Company, and who was stationed at the arsenal at Rock Island [Illinois], getting instruction in some sort of inspection work for the government. I knew he was returning home to the east soon, so hurried on to meet him, but found upon arrival that he had departed just a few hours before for the east, so my hard drive in the rain and inky black night was for naught. The following day I drove on to Cedar Rapids. That was out of my way some, but I wanted to see George Otis, an old time customer of mine in former years, and he and his wife and I used to have some good times. I found them at home and took them to dinner as in days gone by, and we had a grand visit, finishing up the evening at their new home. And the following day, which was Sunday, I drove to Des Moines, the headquarters of my Company.

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While at Des Moines, I had a grand time visiting the Home Office, seeing many of the officials whom I knew personally, and meeting many others whose names I had known so well for the last 17 years. They took me through the entire plant, and I found out just what happens each step of the way to an application blank as it arrives at their desks and starts its way around the various offices. From Des Moines I cut directly south for Kansas City, then on to Tulsa and Oklahoma City, and in the latter place had the pleasure of calling upon an old sweetheart of mine. She is married now, and happily so, but that didn't prevent her knowing me the very instant she opened the door and even tho it was nearly midnight. I had a grand visit with her and her Mother and her husband. The following morning I started for Amarillo, the well known "cow town" of the Panhandle in Texas. The Panhandle gets its name from the shape of the district as you see it on the map, and Amarillo is a typical western cow town. To those of you in the east, don't think that Amarillo is probably just a bunch of shacks erected on the desert far from it, for it, is a real hustling town, very prosperous, has very up to date stores, and an air of breezy freshness about it that does one good.

I'll interrupt myself here long enough to say that from the time I left Ohio, I increasingly felt the lack of trees. In the middle west throughout the open country there are almost no trees, and to one raised in Pennsylvania you know how that would seem. And there is a great variance in the kinds of soil one sees. In Iowa the soil is rich but it rained most of the time I was in the state, and Iowa soil when it is mud is something to write home about. The main highways in that state are well paved, but they have no secondary system as we do in Penn., so when one steps off the highway in the wet weather he is in trouble, and plenty of it. I saw automobiles sunk in the mud and abandoned, all over the place, in highways and byways, in front yards and driveways, and even right in front of the pumps at gas stations, sunk clear to the axles. The farmers in Iowa never seem to think of having a front yard with grass and flower beds, etc. so the yard is just as muddy as the road, and they look pretty bad. Contrary to the good old red color of Penn. barns those in the west were mostly white, and I almost never saw a metal roof on a barn such as we see so often at home. But one thing they have oceans of in Iowa is hogs-----my goodness, I saw hogs by the thousands, all over the place, Hampshires and Brampshires, Poland Chinas, and half a dozen other kinds, the names of which I can't recall, but the smell lingers on. I didn't see many chickens, but they surely have them somewhere in the state for Iowa is one of the large egg producing states in the Union.

Going on down through Oklahoma and Kansas one saw plenty of evidence of the soil erosion we have been reading so much about in the east. It was very bad in many places, but the government has done a grand job of cooperating with the farmers and showing them how to combat it with terraced slopes, panel farming, etc. When I was driving along the highways in open country, I often stopped alongside a field and talked to the farmers about their problems, their ways of doing things, etc. and had many a pleasant visit. They seemed to enjoy comparing notes with somebody from another section of the country too.

The farther one penetrates into the west, the more he sees of range cattle, mostly all white nosed Herefords, in fact I saw thousands of them, and when one crosses the great American desert where the ranges are wide open, he sees so many he wonders who owns them and how they

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know where they have gone to, and which ones belong to which ranchers. They must have some way of telling. In Oklahoma and Kansas one sees mostly red soil, sort of a brick red, and it looks as though it wouldn't grow anything. The wind gets a great sweep in that section, and one can see a curtain of red dust blowing across the pavement for miles ahead. It is tough to have to drive through it, but there isn't anything else to do but roll up the windows and stand it as long as you can, then let in a little fresh air filled with sand, and keep on going. One of the interesting sights was the number of oil wells around and in Oklahoma City, even all around and in between the buildings on the Capitol grounds spoiling the appearance of what had been a fine group of buildings, but boy oh boy, the money they brought in. It seemed as though everybody had one in their backyard, and that isn't very far from being literally true.

I stopped off at Claremore [Oklahoma] to visit the Will Rogers Memorial, and that is one of the outstanding events of the trip. The building itself is upon a hill at the outskirts of town, and completes the right flank of a semi-circle of buildings of the military academy [Oklahoma Military Academy] there. It is a beautiful building, nicely landscaped, and is of course very fine inside.

In the rotunda is a very large statue of Rogers, and it is so lifelike it can almost talk. There are the usual show cases of things connected with his life, including the clothing he wore the day of his fatal flight with Wiley Post. It would take too long to describe the place in detail, but suffice it to say that it is well worth your while to stop and see it if you are in that section. Just as I was about to get into my car to depart, a man saw the "Corry" sign on my license plate and spoke to me about it. He was from New Castle, and we had a good visit.

I drove on down to El Paso just to have a visit with Lee Fosket. You will remember Harry (Patty) and Nell Posket, Gertude and Lula. Lee is the youngest, and is about my age. He is in the leather business there, and he surely was glad to see me. We went over to Juarez just so I could see it, and as near as I could make out about every fifth building was a store of some kind, but all the rest were saloons, and they were crowded to the limit, and a good share of the customers were American soldiers. I went out to Lee's house where I met his wife, a western girl who has never been east. She was very nice and we had a grand visit. Next door to Leo lives a Mrs. Johnson who used to live in Corry, being a sister of Clyde Cook. She it was who told me that Mrs. Florence Morgaridge [73] of Corry, who lived just a couple houses from me, had died since I left home. I had said goodbye to her just a few minutes before I left home, so I could hardly believe that she had gone to her final rooting place. She was a grand woman and a fine friend to me, and I shall miss her always. At the sale of my furnishings she had bought the dining room rug which originally was Aunt Josephine's. She also bought Belle's mahogany writing desk and was so happy to have it. And Belle would be glad to know she had it, but I wonder what will become of it now.

El Paso is an interesting city and a very busy place. In the heart of the city is a tree which is enclosed by a railing, to protect it from the public. On the trunk is a metal plate which has the following inscription which I think interesting enough to copy here for you. It reads:

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"El Paso's First Newspaper"

Near this spot in 1860 grew a Cottonwood tree on whose broad breast were posted many public and private notices. In one of those on August 6th 1860 Anson Mills denounced J. S. Gillett, W. J. Morton and J. R. Sipes, as "Wilful and malicious scoundrels," for calling him an abolitionist. In reply these men called Mills a "Damned black republican and a contemptible pup." Many notices such as those, caused our first citizens to carry "shooting irons" on all occasions.

I am ahead of my story to the extent that I failed to mention my stop at Carlsbad, New Mexico, to see the famous Carlsbad Caverns.



The Big Shot

The "Big Shot" Room, Post Card C1940s

In 1931 it was my pleasure to visit the Luray Caverns in Virginia. Those caverns were originally discovered by a Corry man by name of Stebbins¹, and are very beautiful indeed, in fact I thought they left nothing whatever to be desired in that line. But when one goes through the caverns at Carlsbad he realizes he has seen the Daddy of them all. They really beggar description, for they are so beautiful, so huge, that it is difficult to put one's impressions upon paper. In our party were some three or four hundred persons, and at 10:30 A.M. we began to descend, by foot, into this underground marvel. Winding back and forth, we finally had descended some 800 feet, and had passed through all sorts of fantastic formations of Mother nature.

By noon we reached a room so vast in proportions that it could easily have accommodated a couple thousand persons, and here we found a full fledged restaurant in operation, and it was a welcome stopping place for 45 minutes.

¹ Stebbens was one of three who are credited with the discovery of Luray Caverns.

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Café in Carlsbad Cavern, Post Card C1940s

We then started out on the final half of the exploration, and what we had witnessed in the forenoon was as nothing to that of the afternoon. The intricate shapes, colors and shades of colors of the stalagmites and the stalactites were perfectly fascinating. It didn't take much imagination to see a close resemblance between some of them and other things one has seen in real life. The crowning experience was in the room where the world famous stalagmite known as the "Rock of Ages" stands. It is supposed to be several million years old, I judge, and is a real sight all by itself, but the management of the Caverns dramatize the situation in fine style. The cavern in which this stalagmite stands is the largest underground room in the world-- at least so they say. It isn't just an open space like a room in a house, but very irregular in shape, and with all sorts of smaller stalagmites and stalactites. There are hills and valleys in it. The guide has the crowd wind its way up along the hillsides until they reach the points nearest the top, and they are asked to seat themselves on the stones and ledges here and there. It is a sight to see the crowd slowly wind its way along, ever upward and upward, reminding one of the scene much as it must have been when folks used to do the same thing on the hills across from Jerusalem. Eventually all are seated and everyone is asked to be silent, not event to whisper. Suddenly the lights are all extinguished and there is total darkness, a very black darkness. After a few moments which really seem quite long, there comes far from the distance the sweet tones of a beautiful tenor voice singing "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me, etc.". It was one of the most effective cthings I ever experienced. As the second verse started the lights began to come on, ever so faintly, and by the time it was finished, it was wholly light again. I wouldn't have missed that for anything. We were back at the restaurant by 3:50, from where we could retrace our steps to the top of the ground, taking about an hour, or pay 25¢ and go up in an elevator. I was fortunate to have the 25¢ and ascended to the top in a couple minutes or so, and was glad to again be out in the open in God's sunshine. If you ever have the opportunity, don't fail to see the Carlsbad Caverns. The fee is \$1.50 and well worth it.

From El Paso I set out for Phoenix. It was a long drive on a very hot day, and as the afternoon wore on I became very tired, so much so, that late in the afternoon as I was pushing my way steadily westward and

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with the sun low In the skies so that it shone under the sun visor and directly into my eyes, it seems that I drove right by the inspection station at the border between the state of Texas and the state of Arizona without even seeing it. Seven miles down the line I was stopped by an Arizona highway policeman who made me go all the way back just to have a little stamp put on my windshield stating the car has been inspected and no fruit or vegetables, etc. found, which might have contained insects of a damagining nature. So, after some delay I went back over the same ground again, and darkness began to settle rapidly as it does all over this part of the country when the sun sets, for there is no twilight as we know it in the east. It became very evident that I couldn't make Phoenix for it was too dark and I was too tired. I very much regretted the darkness for I began to go over some very mountainous roads which were not only very dangerous to drive over but would make beautiful scenery in daylight. I finally arrived at the Coolidge Dam, and right out of the darkness loomed an object which proved to be a negro sentry, in fact two of them, and they looked the car over and through, carefully, and then allowed me to pass, with instructions to keep my windows closed until across the dam and on the other side of Lake San Carlos. I don't know why the instructions about the window, just an old custom, I guess. In due time, and late in the evening I arrived at Globe, Arizona and wearily went to bed.

The following morning I started for Yuma, intending to visit Roosevelt Dam close to Globe, but on second thought decided to play no favorites, and so also passed up Roosevelt as well as Coolidge. But the sacrifice was worthwhile for the alternate route took me up through some of the most gorgeous mountains' roads. They are very risky to drive through, and one wonders how in the world roads were built there at all. In one place I pulled off to one side of the road to get out of the car and gaze in wonderment and admiration at one of the mountains when a highway maintenance man also stopped there to erect a warning sign, and I found that he was personally acquainted with Ernie (Busti) McCray of Corry who has for years been Superintendent of an Indian Reservation near Globe. I had intended stopping to see Busti but was several miles beyond the place before I knew it, so sent my card to him by this man and have since had a letter from him here in San Diego, showing that the card was delivered, and showing the value of a chance roadside incident.

Later in the day, I stopped off at a little western town to get some gas. There were three stations right in a row, and I just happened to stop at the one which wasn't busy at the moment. A young lady in slacks waited upon me and put the gas in the oar and then she did an unusually good job of cleaning the windows, so when I paid her and she gave me my change I thanked her graciously in Spanish. She asked me how a person with Penn. license plates would happen to be talking Spanish, and I asked her what was surprising about it, and she replied that she use to live in Penn. and they didn't talk that way where she came from. "Where do you some from?" I asked, and she said "Warren, Pa." You can imagine my surprise, and then hers too when I said I was from Corry. Her father came along just then and she introduced me and we visited for about an hour. Sorry I can't recall her name now.

Arriving in Phoenix it immediately became a real Job to get a place to stay, but finally, through the kindness of the clerk in the Adams Hotel I secured a room at the Arizona Hotel and paid \$3.00 cheerfully for a \$2.00 room. Then I drove out to the house of Robert Douglas Throop of

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Erie, son of Gerald Throop. Bob is a staff sergeant in the air corps and doing very well for himself. He wasn't home so I left a note in the door and went on out to Glendale where I hunted up Bert Heywang who use to live in Corry and whom I hadn't seen in around 20 years. Bert is a brother to Ruth Heywang who works in the Boston Store with Isabelle Heegel. Bert and I had a great old visit. He is Superintendent of the state's experimental poultry station there, and doing very well.

After supper Bob Throop and his new wife came down to the hotel to see me. He has a very sweet wife, a San Antonio girl who is very musical, and plays the pipe organ and piano more than ordinarily well. Bob's mother was also musical, so the little youngster which they expect to have this summer should certainly be able to do something along that line inter in life. Bob likes his work and expects to stay with it until he retires. He expected to be transferred to Roswell N.M. in April, so suppose he is very well settled there by now.

It was a long and hot drive from Phoenix to Yuma, across the desert. About the only things one sees in cattle roaming the open ranges, cactus in my varieties, sagebrush, and mountains. The most interesting thing on this part of the trip was to see the work the government is doing on the great American Canal. It is an irrigation system of vast proportions, and when done will do for thousands of acres in this area what the various other irrigation systems have accomplished in other desert sections, such as Imperial Valley. Yuma is the Center of this activity, and so is enjoying a boom. Ordinarily it isn't much of a place, but now one has to pay prices for hotel rooms that should make them blush for shame, and food prices are out of sight. An ordinary ice cream sundae was 20¢ and other things in proportion. I couldn't say I enjoyed my stay in Yuma. The next morning I was glad to get on my way on what was the last leg of the grip, but before doing so visited the museum of Fort Yuma, a new undertaking at Yuma, and full of things pertaining to the early days of the west when it was really wild and wooly. Upon leaving the fort one crosses the Colorado River and once again has to have the car inspected. They do a very thorough job there, removing practically everything from the car to make sure there are no fruits or vegetables that might be carrying insects into California. They were pretty decent in my case when they saw to what pains I had gone to pack things so carefully into the car, and let me off with a minimum of disturbance. Then the usual guards were at the river where I had to again go through the routine of telling my birthplace, birth date, etc. and was instructed to keep the windows rolling rolled up until across the river. Nobody, including the guards, seemed to know the why for of that requirement, but it has to be complied with.

A few miles from Yuma I saw something that I wouldn't have believed if I hadn't seen it myself, and that was a herd of camels doing active work with the highway maintenance crew. I didn't suppose there were any camels in this country outside a circus. It surely was a surprising thing to run across. Then I crossed miles of desert right through the center of the sanddunes. They vary from 15 feet to 75 feet in height, and are an interesting thing, to see. The wind was blowing hard that way and one could see the sand traveling across the desert in great clouds. It wasn't any particular fun when one happened to strike my car. Alongside the highway were the ruins, miles of them, of the old courderoy roads of the early days. They were a silent monument to the days of struggle and sacrifice by the pioneers of another day.

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Eventually, that day, I drove through the Imperial Valley and came through La Mesa and late in the afternoon arrived in downtown San Diego and went at once to the U. S. Grant Hotel, the end of my journey, and the end of 3422 miles of all kinds³ of driving without one single untoward event, no flat tires, no engine trouble, and from snowbanks at one end, to miles of orange groves and palm trees at the other end. Surely God had been good to watch over me on this most important trip, and if there were those of my beloved friends and relatives who prayed for my safety and welfare, their prayers were answered in full, and I was duly grateful.



U.S. Grand Hotel (Right), San Diego, CA Post Card, C1940s

My very first impression of San Diego was the step-up in the tempo at things as compared with my visit here in March of 1920. At that time it was a very pretty, easy going semi-tropical town, and I was so pleased with it that I thought I would sometime like to return and try living here. It took 22 years for that to come about, 22 years and 9 days. You should see the town now! It has undergone a great change since this war started. In a little over a year somewhere around 150,000 to 200,000 additional person have poured in here to work in the airplane plants to say nothing of the thousands of soldiers, sailors and marines. The downtown part of the city is as busy during the daytime as any American city I know of, and on Saturday night—well, you just have to see it to appreciate it. Very naturally there has arisen the problem of controlling the traffic. Considering that the local police force is too small in the circumstances, they do a pretty good job of keeping things under control. Parking meters have been installed within the last 8 months and are bringing in a revenue of about \$10,000.00 per month to the city's coffers. Automobile drivers are here from 48 states and elsewhere, each with his own ideas of what constitutes good driving, and you should see some of the tangles that occur at corners where there are no officers or traffic lights. It is interesting in the business section to see how well folks who are pedestrians faithfully obey the traffic lights, and one almost never sees a person crossing on foot in the middle of the block. For one thing, the blocks here are very short, so that makes it easy to go to the corner to cross.

My first problem was to get a place to stay. In the situation, natives here are taking full advantage of the opportunity to make hay while the sun shines. Rents are outrageous, but you just have to pay if you want to stay, and you are lucky to find a place at that. One woman offered me one of twin beds in a room with private bath but not private entrance, and with two men to share a clothes press hardly large enough for one, at the rate of \$25 per month of each of us, making \$50 per month, or \$600 per year out of just one room in her house. That is equal to a 3% return on a \$20,000 investment, so naturally I couldn't see it, and walked out. But it is that way all over the town. Restaurants are doing a land office business, and it is a common experience to have to stand in a restaurant and wait your turn to sit down to eat if you happen in at mealtime. You will be interested to know a little about where I am living, or rather rooming, for I eat just wherever I happen to be, and by this time have learned the best places.

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After hunting around for a few days, I came to this house at 2921

Juniper Street, which is a very good section of the city. The name of the owner was L. J. Titus. I rather liked the place as soon as I saw it, and while the room was nothing to write home about, still and all, it wasn't so bad, and it did have a very large clothes closet which was necessary because of the boxes and bundles of things I had brought along in the car. L. J. Titus



2912 Juniper Street, C2016

turned out to be a "Miss" Titus around 50 I should say. Her brother had died not so long ago and she was left alone. She has a woman living with her who is a domestic nurse, and there is a young man rooming here in another room close to mine, and we get along fine. I was interested in the "Titus" end of the situation because I knew and L. J. Titus very well in Spartansburgh, Pa. Also knew a lot of this brothers and other relatives. So I mentioned it to her, and she said that she didn't know much about her family history except that her father had told her years ago that they originally came from Crawford County in Penn. Well, wasn't that something? I then explained to her about the Titus families in that county and how Titusville had been named after them. Then she dug up some old tintypes of her folks, and her father and brother bore a very close resemblance to George Titus of Corry, father of Douglas Titus. You could have knocked me over with a feather. A day or two later I told her she wasn't very far from being a cousin or mine, and showed her on my genealogical maps how my Mother was of the 4th generation of Blileys, starting with Andrew Bliley and Mary Bamen, and how also from that same union there descended Sebastian Bliley and Magdalen Credler then Ferdinand Bliley and Gertrude Yoeten, then John F. Bliley who was hence also in the 4th generation, and he married a Miss Aurey Vay Titus of Crawford County, Pa. It was such a startling and unexpected development that we had a good laugh over it. Isn't it strange how things happen in this world? At any rate, she and Mrs. Burns, the woman who lives with her, have boon very good to me ever since I landed here. They make up my bed, keep the room clean, keep fresh flowers in my room at all times, give me flowers for the office, and every now and then when I come home late at night I find a nice piece of cake on the dresser, and gee, that is quite all right with me.

The yard is large and full of flowers of all kinds. Everyone out here has flowers and oceans of them. The thing I enjoy most is the orange tree just outside My room, for it is loaded with oranges and whenever I want one I just pick it off and eat it right on the spot--and boy oh boy do I ever get a thrill out of that. It beats Penn. snowballs all hollow. Another thing of interest is the great number of different birds---the sparrow being the only one familiar to me. The mockingbird is a very interesting one, but also a nuisance in that he commences to sing just about midnight and keeps up an incessant chorus all night long. With hundreds of them around, it is just too bad if you happen to waken because he keeps you from going to sleep again. But there is one familiar sound in the mornings that makes me smile and feel like I'm back on the farm at Apollo, and that is the good old familiar cackle of some hens someone has around here. It adds just the home atmosphere that I like, and it makes me feel good, and I smile and know that all is well with the world.

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Speaking of flowers, they ought to call this state Lantania, because Lantanas grow all over the place. There are short and tall varieties, creepers, etc. and various colors, and they are very much more attractive than the ones I use to have at home. And geraniums are almost a weed out here, they grow so prolifically. With their bright red blooms they make a great sight when planted in mass lots. There are lots of native flowers that I haven't as yet learned the names of, but in another year I'll know most of them.



Lantania Bush

The orange and lemon and grapefruit groves are a really beautiful sight at any time, but especially to one from the east. A few days ago I visited a lovely home where they had all kinds of flowers and fruit trees growing in their yard. And believe it or not, I saw growing on one tree, lemons, grapefruit, and two kinds of oranges. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it. Just goes to show what they can do out here with grafting. Then, too, there is a popular hedge out here made from the Eugenia shrub, and it has a lovely bright and shiny leaf, partially green and reddish, and it grows just anywhere, good soil or bad, wet weather or dry, and it can be allowed to grow up into a big tree, trimmed into any old style bush or shrub, and makes a grand shrub. I wish you could have some in the east, but this particular shrub never would stand the winters back home.

When I arrived here I expected to find guns of many kinds all over the place, on the street comers, in the parks, on the roof tops etc. and armed soldiers everywhere one would turn, but such is not the case, I understand there are plenty of gun emplacements all around the hills surrounding the city, and in fact have been shown where some of them are, but one never would know it unless shown.

There are lots of soldiers camping around this area, in some of the parks, in buildings, in the outskirts, etc. and they could enter the city in a hurry if necessary. Down at the Bay one can see warships of one kind or another most any time, and particularly troop transports. They come silently, and silently depart, taking with them thousands of the boys from the east and middle west, probably to Australia, and some to Alaska perhaps, and goodness knows where. Army and Navy trucks and Jeeps keep running around the city all the time until one pays little attention to them. And then the airplanes. There are planes in the air all the time, never a vast quantity at one time but some all the time, it is a pretty sight to see a squadron of nine to a dozen planes doing formation practice in the air. And then the flying fortresses??? They really are something to see. They are made at the plants along the shore right close to the business section, so that when they go into the air or come down for a landing, they are so low that it seems as though you could talk to the pilot and ask him how he found the weather way up there in the sky. They are huge things, and yet they soar so gracefully along over the rooftops that it is hard to believe they are built for the purpose of destruction of human life, and property. It makes one feel that we should be thankful they aren't loaded with bombs

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to be unloaded upon our heads. Of course, there are a great many who think that San Diego is a pretty hot spot to be in during the war, and perhaps they are right, but we haven't had any real war scare as yet since I have been living here. There has been no air raid alarm since I arrived, and I haven't seen any bomb shelter yet, and it wasn't until a week or so ago that they had a blackout. That was an interesting thing, and fortunately lasted only 35 minutes. I had just left the Masonic Temple and was within a hundred yards or so of the house when the alarm sounded. I drove into the driveway and locked the car and then stood on the front lawn, watching to see how they worked it. Just across the ravine adjoining this street is the Naval hospital, about the largest in the world, having 2500 beds. They got their lights out in good time, and all other lights were extinguished everywhere. One by one I could hear and see auxiliary firemen leaving their homes and going to the fire station which is within a stone's throw of this house, so I went over there, too, and we all stood around and talked in low tones, just as though an enemy pilot might hear us. There was an unidentified plane in the air, and we watched the searchlights pick it out of the skies and focus a crossbeam of lights on it until they made sure it was a friendly plane, and then they let it go on. Likely it either was from across the border in Mexico, or else it was a plane purposely planted up there by the local authorities to add a bit of realism to the occasion. However, the night itself was of the very brightest of moonlight nights to, and an enemy bomber pilot couldn't have missed an objective if he wanted to—one could read a paper or play pinocle in the brilliant floodlight of a gorgeous moon. It may be that the Japs will try a raid on this city some day or night, but it seems hardly likely they will get very far with it, and surely the planes never would get back to their aircraft carrier base, or at least so it seems, but then, so many impossible things have happened in this war that one never can tell. At any rate, I hope to be around when it takes place. If I live through it, I'll be able to give you a first hand account.

The airplane plants string out along the shore of the bay, and are quite a sight in themselves. They employ thousands upon thousands of men and women. It is a terrific problem to find a place for them to live, and the Government has done a grand job in the circumstances. Just outside the city limits is plain mesa land, or desert, and is one of those sections, within a year's time the Government has erected 3500 houses, housing 17,000 persons, with over 5,000 of them being under 6 years old. They are nice homes, and the lawns are in, and are green and nice, the flowers and shrubs going full tilt, the utilities all installed and working, the roadways paved, etc. You wouldn't believe it if you didn't see it---a marvellous accomplishment in that length of time, and more houses still going up.

San Diego is laid out in what was originally just a bunch of canyons in the desert, and the canyons are all over the city making many interruptions in streets, and causing one to do a lot of extra driving around to find the house he is looking for. It seems as though everybody loves flowers, for there are oceans of them, and plenty of palm trees of all kinds---the date palm being my favorite so far. Most of the houses are of one story and are white or cream colored stucco which seems to do very well in this climate. There are no basements, and in cold weather the houses are not very warm. But a drive through the residential sections is an unending wonderment at the beauty that exists here. One of the things an easterner notices here right away is the lack of twilight, and as soon as the sun sets the air becomes cool,

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very cool, in fact, and you need a topcoat to keep comfortably warm. As far as that goes, even in the middle of the day, if one steps from the sunshine into the shade of a building or a telephone pole, it is immediately cool, and in that way it is easy for everyone to catch cold, and they do. At home we have a long twilight and in the summer so warm all day and night that topcoats can be done away with in the middle of the summer, but not that way here.

Another thing one notices here is the community wide habit of women wearing slacks---everyone seems to do it. Most of the suits look like pajamas, just as if they just got out of bed, and almost none of the suits have enough slack where they ought to have it. And almost all men and women except old folks walk though town holding hands--I never saw so much hand holding, I haven't tried any of it yet, but perhaps I'll try it out some day when the right skirt---or slack---comes along.

My Company has offices in the San Diego Trust and Savings Building, in the heart of the city, and they are nice and comfortable, a handy place for any of you to locate me when you come to San Diego.

By this time I have become fairly well acquainted with the layout of the town and get around to good advantage. It isn't so easy to start right in where you don't know a soul in a city of this size, but have managed fairly well so far, and have written a good volume of business for the length of time here and the circumstances in general. Had hoped to find a town of a little smaller size in this area, and indeed have located one that will perhaps be where I'll be located later on, but at present until after the tire situation clears up more favorably, and until after I find out what the Government may do with me after that last registration, I will continue to remain here where I can get around on street cars and busses in the emergency.

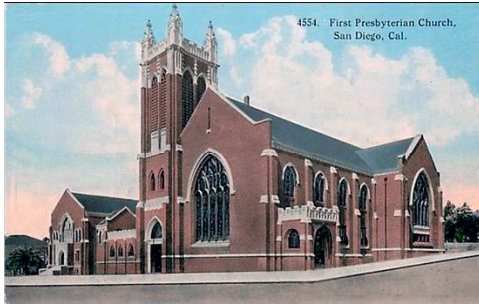
Have met many fine folks from here and back east, including a young man by name of Taylor from Erie,----Paul F. Taylor. His dad is a travelling salesman, connected with the steel industry, I believe, and makes Corry right along as one of his towns. Have been to Blue Lodge, and Chapter and Consistory meetings, and have had many fine evenings with those bodies. Of course they usually call upon the visitor for remarks, so it has given me a good chance to make myself known, also to use over again some of the stories that use to go over good back east. While their Masonic work here is the same as ours in fundamental principles, yet being in the southern jurisdiction, has many different customs than ours, and they prove most interesting to me.

There are many beautiful and interesting places around San Diego, such as La Jolla (pronounced La Joy-ya), and Coronado, and then too, the quaint Tijuana just across the border. If you ever went down there on a Sunday afternoon you wouldn't think there was any shortage of rubber, for the cars are lined up at the gate six cars abreast, and miles long. La Jolla is too most beautiful place, my goodness, one couldn't wish



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for a nicer place in which to retire and take life easy. Perhaps I can find a rich widow who would like to have me help her do that---at any rate it's a good idea. I haven't had time as yet to get up to Los Angeles and see my many acquaintances up there, but likely will do up that way before long. Will try to spend two or three days there so as to really get around.



First Presbyterian Church, San Diego

organizations for all ages and both sexes,---a really live church.

I have been attending the 1st Presbyterian Church here, a very fine church building with 59 rooms in it, 2,000,000 bricks, a fine auditorium seating 1600 to 2000, and a very fine young minister who has added 490 new members in the last 20 months. I was there at a very beautiful Easter service, around 180 joining the church that day, and hundreds being turned away from the church for lack of more seating capacity. They have two prayer meetings each week, and numerous clubs and

Ann so I draw this letter to a close. You can see by the first page that I started it, on April 23, and am just now completing it on May 10. I had intended to wind up by writing about the humorous things that happened along the line ever since I've been here, but guess that will await another time. This letter has been long, but I wanted each of you to know most of the things that have been here related, and obviously I couldn't write such a long letter to each one. I hope each will find something of interest in the letter, and I hope each will forward it to the next one on the attached list as soon as possible. And of course I'll be more than glad to hear from you whenever you can find time to write.

And now I came to the conclusion on this, Mother's Day, I went to church this morning and enjoyed a beautiful service, over 1400 being there, and the sermon being most applicable to the occasion. It was just 14 years ago yesterday that I laid away my own precious Mother one of the finest angels God ever sent to this earth, and when at last she breathed her last, I know that she returned whence she came, there to enrich that Kingdom where Life is eternal, and there to prepare & place for those of us who have been left here. I like to think of her in the terms of Fessenden's grand tribute to Motherhood in these words:

To My Mother

You painted no Madonnas on chapel walls in Rome,
But with a touch diviner you lived one in your home.

You wrote no lofty poems that critics counted art,
But with a nobler vision you lived them in your heart.

You carved no shapeless marble to some high soul design,
But with a finer sculpture you shaped this soul of mine.

You built no great cathedrals that centuries applaud,
But with a finer sculpture your life cathedraled God.

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1. Mr. & Mrs. Frank A. Bliley, 649 W. 9th st., Erie, Pa.
(Florence Gehrlein-----Isabel Heegal)
2. Mr. & Mrs. Henry McConnell, 606 Market St., Warren, Pa.
3. Mr. & Mrs. Samuel J. Wagner, 310 Oastlebar Rd., Rochester, N.Y.
4. Mrs. Gertrude Bliley Pancoast, 979 Whittier St., Akron, O.
5. Miss Frances Lambing, Star Route, Apollo, Pa.
(Emma, Callie, Ora, Mary) Also Doyle and Belva if possible)
6. Mrs. Rose Coulter Wean, Elders Ridge, Edri, Pa.
(Mina, Joe, Olive, Jess, Blanche Lambing)
7. Rose, please send the latter over to Aunt Kate. I'll write her later what to do with it.

End of Wilbur's Letter



Wilbur Lambing, Circa 1960

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Rochester, NY
August 2016*