

The Life of William Adolphus Allen (1861-1954)

William Adolphus Allen was the son of William and Elizabeth Ann (Bodey) Allen. William Allen Sr. was a railroad construction engineer, employed all over the world. Young Bill Allen was born and raised in Tywardsreath, county Cornwall, England. As a young lad he worked in the newspaper business, besides being the village schoolmaster. Most of the people in the western part of England worked in the coal mines under very difficult conditions, therefore, promoting thoughts of immigrating to America where the working conditions and life apparently were much better. Young Bill with his mother and 3 sisters sailed for America in the summer of 1881. The first thing that Bill wished to do was to visit Washington, D.C., the cradle of the new world.

He had just disembarked from the train in the small station of Washington when he heard a great commotion. Unbelievably, the 20th President of the United States, James Garfield, was also in the station. Suddenly a shot rang out, and the president lay dying on the platform. The assassin, Charles Guiteau, an anarchist, was under arrest. That was in July of 1881. William Allen, a fledgling reporter who just arrived from England, saw, listened and recorded the event, and then sent the report to all the newspapers in the country. Garfield's death on Sept. 20th made Chester Arthur, a Vermonter from East Fairfield, and the 21st President of the United States.

The family settled in DuBois, Pennsylvania where the coal mines were very active and needed experienced workers, young William worked there as a reporter. He then went to Albany, N.Y. with James Hill, owner of *The Elmira Telegram*. He later worked for *The Albany Evening Journal*, owned by William Barnes, a New York Republican leader. Later still, young William went to *The Albany Times Union*, owned by the then Democratic Governor of N.Y., Martin Glynn. It followed that my grandfather, William A. Allen, became the political reporter and later Editor of *The Albany Times Union* for 27 years. During this time he was assigned to Teddy Roosevelt, and was at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, N.Y. when President William McKinley was shot on Sept. 6, 1901 by an anarchist. William came home to Albany with Teddy Roosevelt, who was en route to Washington to take his seat as President.

William was in Syracuse, N.Y. at the Roosevelt-Barnes libel trial when the A.P. sent news of the sinking of the Lusitanian. His interview with Roosevelt on the catastrophe created a worldwide sensation.

Another happenstance that William reported struck close to home. On May 31, 1889, a wall of water, in some places 70 ft. high, came roaring down from the mountains and smashed through Johnstown, Pa., killing in a matter of minutes over 2000 men, women and children. He reported this awful catastrophe after the waters subsided. The girl who later became William's wife, Anne Clementine Luke, had survived the flood.

It is amazing that a small town newspaper reporter from Ttywardsreath, England could, in the course of more than 70 years, have covered so many world shaking events!

Among some of the important events he covered, which at this time would have to be looked up, were: The homestead strike of 1892 in which H. C. Frick, a steel industry tycoon, was shot; In 1893 the first gasoline buggy was used in Springfield, Mass.; In 1894, he went as a reporter with Jacob S. Coxe and his thousands of rag-tag and bob-tail hoodlums to Washington DC.

In the late 1890's, he covered the discovery of x-ray/radium; he was a correspondent at Camp Black during The Spanish American War; and he covered the Filipino insurrection and the capture of Aquinaldo. Then the San Francisco earthquake came in 1906; and the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. He covered the Poncho Villa war, in which "Black Jack" Pershing was glorified. He reported on the countless stories coming from of both World Wars.

William Allen worked many years for *The Albany Times Union*, and knew personally many of the political leaders of New York and the nation. He had also run a circus, worked as a coal miner, grocer, and press agent.

In 1937, he was severely injured in an automobile accident in Albany by a hit-and run driver which left him partially blind and paralyzed on the left side. While he was recovering in a hospital, he wrote a human interest story about a three-year-old waif, adopted by the hospital staff that attracted nationwide attention.

Bill Allen "retired" and moved to Essex Junction, Vt. to live with his son James. Not able to retire completely, he bid on and got a mail messenger job. He worked from 5 am to 7 pm with 4 hours free, carrying 60-100 lbs. sacks of mail a 1000 ft. from the train to the post office. Those were the times when the mail was dropped from a hook attached to the train into a cart.

For 15 years Bill Allen wrote "Down Memory Lane" and "Uncle Bill Says" for *The Essex Junction Suburban List*. It was his underlying purpose to inspire his readers to ***"live with a cheerfulness of heart and enjoy the blessings of a fruitful life."*** He could have made barrels of money, but it meant nothing to him. He had a job to do, and did it clean. He was special, and my grandfather whom I was so proud of. I see him in my children every day.

- Mary Jane (Allen) Cain