

The Early Years

1920 – 1932

I have always had a bad memory for specifics. My wife, Lou, tells me I don't pay attention. If so, that has been a life-long trait. However, as I work on my history, bits and pieces come back.

My parents were Cyrus Holbrook Fuller (Sr) and Gladys Beulah Whelan Fuller. I assume that I was named for my two grandfathers; William E. Whelan and Richard Edwin Fuller.



Clockwise from the top: My mother's Uncle John Whelan, Aunt Margaret Whelan (his wife), Aunt Josephine Whelan, Grandmother Rose Whelan, Gladys B. Fuller, Cyrus H. Fuller.

We seem to have moved a lot when I was young. I know from my Birth Certificate that I was born on October 27, 1920, at 1802 Central Avenue on the near-north side of Indianapolis. The house is no longer there. Searches for a picture in various archives have not produced one. Research in old Polk Company Indianapolis City Directories (some years are missing from the Indianapolis Public Library) shows that we lived at the following addresses: 1921: 3107 East Washington; 1923: 2537 Ashland Avenue; 1926: 3037 Bellefontaine Avenue; 1927: 5316 Carrollton Avenue; 1928: 1532 East 10th Street; 1930: 1704 East 10th Street; etc. After that, there is a gap in directory

information, probably because the city directories didn't, at that time, record information from the Ravenswood area where we moved about 1931.

From my brother Bob's Birth Certificate, I learned that in 1925 we lived at 2964 Cornell Avenue. This agrees with my memory of the "Toonerville Trolley" that ran on 30th Street connecting with the College Avenue street car.

Bob, and in fact all of we three boys, were born at home. That was a typical practice in those days. Later Mom told Lou (see *Twenty One*) that Grandmother Rose couldn't stand to see her suffer so while we were being born she always managed to visit some where else.

I don't know the reason for all this moving, but I suspect it was money. In the best scenario Mom and Dad were looking for cheaper housing; in the worst scenario they were unable to pay the rent. If one doesn't pay one month, you get a notice; if one doesn't pay two months the notice is an eviction notice, probably enforced by the sheriff. I don't remember being evicted.

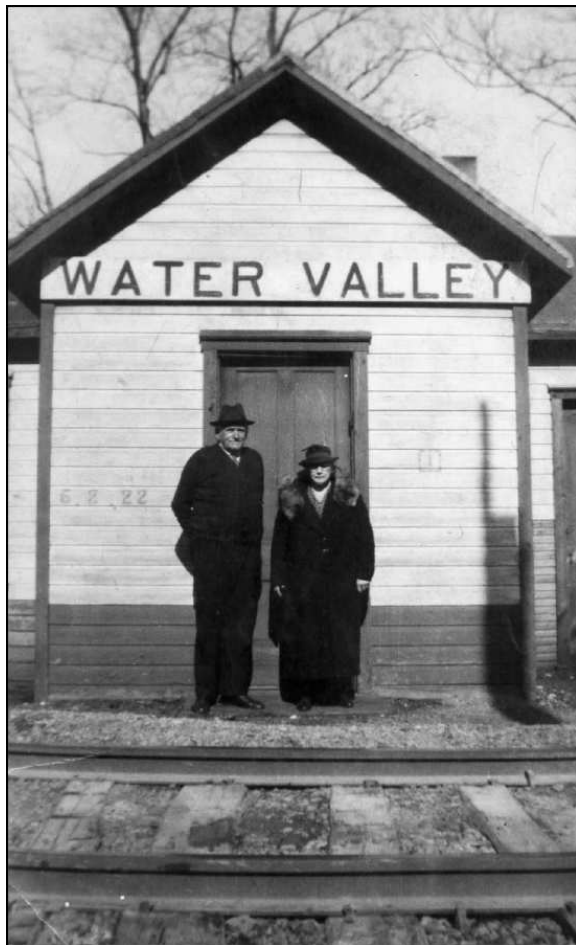
My Granddad, Richard Edwin Fuller, worked for the Monon. As I heard it, his work was in a locomotive shop where the engines were repaired. He was injured, I was told, by a jack, a device for raising the locomotive, falling on him. That must have been about 1926 because he wasn't listed in the Indianapolis Directories after that. That must be when he and Grandma, Ada Blanche Cox Fuller, moved back to Shelby, Indiana where they raised chickens. Shelby is a small town in southern Lake County Indiana along the Kankakee River. It is a few miles south of Lowell, Indiana.

Dad worked for the Monon Railroad at that time and he sometimes got passes on the Monon and we would ride the train to Shelby to visit our grandparents. I remember something about the rides, especially, riding through the center of towns along the way. I especially liked the feeling of being a person of interest to these people, as we all like to see people on trains.

Later, when Dad no longer worked for the railroad, we went by car. I don't remember how many times we did that, but I do remember one trip in particular. We had a "touring" car. These cars didn't have windows, but had special curtains which could be mounted on the sides for protection against rain and cold. Radios, air-conditioners and even heaters had not yet come into being. The thing that made that one trip so memorable was flat tires. Cars had pneumatic tires, but the tire was a casing and had an "inner tube" which provided the air cushioning. When something caused

the inner tube to lose air, called a flat tire, the wheel had to be removed, the tire removed from the wheel rim and the tube patched. On this trip we had 11 flat tires. Dad had to fix them all. I don't know if AAA had been created by then, but we didn't have it!

The route we took was along what is now U.S. 52 to U.S. 41. My Mother and Father both spoke of driving on what is now Northwestern Avenue in West Lafayette. Then we left U.S. 41 at Schneider and drove across country to Shelby. We rarely, if ever, ate in restaurants, but on at least one of these trips we did. There I had the famous Manhattan sandwich which made enough of an impression for me to remember it. This was a staple of the little roadside restaurants of those days: a slice of white bread with a slice of roast beef on it, a scoop of mashed potatoes, all covered with brown gravy - delicious.



My grandparents, Richard Edwin and Blanch Cox Fuller at the Water Valley train Station near Shelby. Two lines intersected there. Grandpa told me it was a law that if two trains arrived at the same time, both must stop and neither could proceed until the other had passed.

Some years I spent part of the summer in Shelby with Grandpa and Grandma, Richard Edwin and Ada Blanch Cox Fuller. There they raised chickens. I recall hearing that they had a thousand chickens. They were not caged, but had roosts to go to at night and places they went to lay their eggs. A lot of vigilance was required. If a chicken got hurt in any way, she had to be separated from the others because they attacked at the sight of blood. Vigilance was also required because occasionally one would get over the fence and in danger of being struck by passing autos. When one was struck by a car, we had chicken for supper.

You may want to close your eyes on this next section. When a chicken was hit and mortally hurt, Grandma would grasp it by the head and twirl it until the head came off. I don't know why she didn't look for an ax. They did use an ax when a chicken was selected to be killed for supper. After a chicken's head is cut off, its nervous system keeps functioning and it thrashes about wildly on the ground. This always made the description of aimless activity as the act of "a chicken with its head cut off" meaningful to me. After this stopped it had to be hung by its feet to drain the blood. I don't remember ever being required to do this myself. Then the feathers must be removed. I can still "smell" that strong odor that comes from immersing the chicken in hot water to help remove its feathers. Then the carcass was singed to remove the remaining "pin feathers." None of this gruesome ordeal made the ensuing meal unpalatable.

I don't know how they financed this chicken operation, possibly from some settlement the railroad gave Grandpa. Earlier, Grandpa's family had had some money. Perhaps some was left at this time. There wasn't any by the time I came along.

I don't remember how many such summers I spent in Shelby. Maybe only one; probably more. Here are some of the things I remember about those visits. The trainmen coming through Shelby (It was the Monon Railroad) would often throw off coal along the tracks south of Grandpa's place and one of my jobs was to go pick it up for use in the stove. This was apparently a way of trying to do something nice for Grandpa. They also dropped off used papers; Indianapolis papers going north and Chicago papers going south. I also went with Grandpa to bring ice from the "ice house" where it had been stored under leaves after being cut from the river (Kankakee) during the winter. The leaves and the trees shading the icehouse kept it frozen all summer long. One of the worst days was when

Grandpa took me to Lowell (maybe Crown Point) to buy a pair of shoes. The ones he picked out had high ankles and buttoned. I was sure they were girls shoes. I don't know why it had to be those shoes. I remember crying a lot about them and Grandpa telling me what great shoes they were!

This may be a good place to mention the kinds of trousers we sometimes wore. One kind was called "knickers." They were short pants that buckled below the knee. They did not "blouse" much. Another, fancier, type was "Plus-fours." These also buckled below the knees, but had a large blouse effect.

Entertainment was simple, but also a bit complex. Grandpa had a huge radio. It was powered by several automobile type batteries. I don't know why, because I'm pretty sure the house had electricity. Recalling a washing machine is why I think so. The radio had at least six or seven dials and these had to be tuned in precise ways to improve the volume and sound quality. I don't remember what we listened to. Grandpa and Grandma also had a Victrola (a wind-up, record playing device). It was from this that I got my introduction to humor. They had a record of a comedy team: The Two Black Crows. The first jokes I can remember hearing came from them. "I'll meet you down by the pig pen in half an hour. You wear your hat so I'll know you." and "I'll meet you down at the store in half an hour. If you get there first, you make a mark; if I get there first, I'll rub it out."

The only one of our residences that I really remember is the one at 1532 East 10th Street. That was where great-grandmother Rose Whelan, my mother's grandmother, died according to her Death Certificate. She had lived with Mom and Dad throughout their days in Indianapolis after WWI according to the City Directories. Maybe her death helps me remember that house.

I don't remember being real close to her, but I must have been because in later years my Dad told Lou (see *Twenty One*) that "Rose was too, easy on Bill." I recall that she had been ill. One morning, when she wasn't at breakfast, I asked about her and Mom told me, in a kind, but sympathetic, voice that grandma "wasn't sick anymore." She died on Saturday, April 12, 1930. I was nine and one-half years old. As was often the case in those days, the funeral was held in our house - body, casket and all. Her death was attributed to Chronic Myocarditis, contributed to by Arterio Sclerosis.

Although Dad was listed on his military records as a barber in civilian life, from 1920 until 1927 he was listed in the Indianapolis City

Directories as a railroad switchman. So money shouldn't have been a problem as he was working for the Monon Railroad. His job was in the marshaling yards where freight trains are assembled for the long haul. Trains went back and forth, being connected to the box cars appropriate for a particular destination. Around 1930 Dad was injured on the job. He slipped on a pile of gravel as he was leaping to catch the rung of a ladder on a box car and swung beneath the train and out again. He missed death, but his foot was run over by the train and two toes had to be amputated. I place the time for this event by it having occurred after Grandmother Whelan died, but before Ravenswood.

An additional fact about our life during this period is revealed in some of Dad's records. Because of a money shortage, Dad apparently applied to the United States Veterans Bureau for a disability allowance based on the loss of his two toes. He was granted a monthly disability allowance of \$12 per month based on 25% disability. This fact was communicated to him by Representative Louis Ludlow. He wrote this to Dad on December 8, 1930 addressed to 1606 East 10th Street. Dad thanked Mr. Ludlow three days later from 1704 East 10th Street. In his letter Dad mentioned how this allowance would help in the "hard times." The Great Depression had started.

I played with kids in the neighborhood, but I can't tell you the names of any of them. I remember we had a lot of fun around Pogue's Run, a creek - maybe almost a drainage ditch - that was two houses away. It was kept in its banks (and still is) by retaining walls about six feet high, although they seemed higher back then. Of course, jumping off the top down to the creek bed was something to do, and once, at least, this produced a sprained ankle for me.

While we lived in this area, and I suspect it is why we lived there, I attended the Theodore Potter Fresh Air School. It was located along East 10th Street on the grounds of Arsenal Technical High School. At this school, fresh air was considered a curative. The air in Indianapolis was often very polluted, but when it wasn't we studied with the windows open all winter long. All of us were given gray woollen robes, mittens and hoods. We must have looked like a bunch of little monks sitting at our desks. We took rests on blankets on the floor, etc. I remember having a crush on my first grade teacher. I remember learning how the words of songs are arranged in song books. I remember using "sticks" to learn sums. Beyond that, I don't

remember a lot about these school years.

I also don't recall if there was fee associated with attending this school. I never thought it about until someone, finding my Web Page as a result of looking for the Potter School, commented on the cost of attending. I would be surprised to learn that the family had enough money for any kind of tuition. Perhaps there special allowances for poor kids.

As I recall, I started school at six, but because of illness didn't finish the year and started over when I was seven. Generally, until I finished the sixth grade, I was a sickly kid. At that time, I recall being judged to be strong enough not to need the fresh air school anymore and we moved farther north in Indianapolis. Until I was almost 18 years old I never weighed more than 110 pounds even though I was about 6 foot 1 inch tall.

There is a problem with chronology here. First of all, I guess I must have been five years old (six in October) in 1926 when I think I started school. Then if I was out for a year, I must have skipped a grade later on or I wouldn't have been in grade 8A in June 1934. I have a dated professional photograph to confirm that. The other alternatives are that I mis-remember being out of school and starting over the next year or Mom started me in school when I was five.

Most neighborhoods had a motion picture theater, that is, a movie house. Movies with sound did not come along until the 1930s. Films were in black and white, of course, and dialogue ran along the bottom of the screen so the viewer knew what was happening. This was often humorous in that the actors would mouth many lines while at the bottom would appear something like: "Will you marry me, my beauty?" More lengthy mouthings would have the heroine saying: "Never." Part of the attraction was a continuing "serial" much like today's soap operas. These were the origin of the term "cliff hanger" because they usually left the hero or heroine (It was usually the latter) in a life threatening situation, frequently hanging on to a tree on the side of a cliff. There was often a villain who, when rebuffed by a refusal of marriage, left the heroine tied to a railroad track or to a log about to be split by a huge saw in a saw mill. Many of the old theaters had marvelous organs. In addition to the visual images, tension was created by talented organists who created moods by proper selection of chords, pace and volume.

Our theater, on 10th Street, was the Hamilton, which stood on the corner of Hamilton and East 10th Street. I was lucky enough to get a job

passing out play-bills. These were cards about 4 by 8 inches in size listing a month or six weeks of coming films. I distributed these to all the houses in our neighborhood. For my efforts I received passes to the theater. Every Saturday was spent there. I went when they opened and stayed at least until supper time.

Another childhood incident was my brief fling at smoking. I have always thought I was about seven when this happened, but I associate it with 10th Street. In any case, one of my friends had gotten a cigarette from some place and he and I smoked a bit of it behind the garage or some such building. I don't know how Mom got wind of this, but she did. I received a lecture about it. Most lectures on things like smoking, drinking, etc., included a statement like. "When you want to do something, come and tell me about it. Don't sneak around to do it." I also recall being kept in the house for the afternoon. I don't know whether it was the lecture or the punishment, but I decided smoking wasn't worth it and gave it up. I was tempted again in High School, but I'll tell about that later.

My middle brother Cyrus Holbrook Fuller, Jr., and I had an afternoon paper route on nearby Massachusetts Avenue. The paper we sold and delivered was the Indianapolis Times. There were two really miserable aspects to this business. One was that Massachusetts was a dirty street. This was especially bad when it rained and most of the time in the winter when there was a lot of slush. We literally had to protect the papers with our bodies to protect them from the water thrown up by passing cars. The other miserable aspect was collecting. It was often necessary for Mom to go to get the money from some of our "dead-beat" customers. People would also move away without leaving the money for their papers.

This brother was known as "June bug" (because he was a Junior) in those years. Cyrus and Holbrook were not common names and didn't lend themselves to shortening, i.e., to nick names. At school kids experimented with things like "Half Brook," but eventually settled on "Holy." They didn't even try anything with Cyrus. After the war, Holy stayed in Tennessee where he had married a lovely girl, Sarah Frances Graham. There, either by his design or because Cyrus seemed more natural to southern folk, he became "Cy." He became so southern that his friends wondered why his brothers moved to the north! Holy died March 25, 1998 after a ten year bout with prostate cancer.

For my younger brother, Robert John Fuller, walking came later than for most kids. When he



My brother Bob and me at about two and seven. Family lore is that brother Holy was upset about something and wouldn't pose. Those shoes may be the ones which I disliked so much.

was the "Ice Man." Most homes had an "ice box," a well insulated cabinet, to hold ice and keep food from spoiling. There was a door, frequently top-opening, for the blocks of ice and another door for the compartment where foods were stored. The ice man carried the ice blocks with large metal tongs. These plunged into the sides of the block of ice.

There were two things to remember about the ice box. One was to put up the sign for the ice man. This was a diamond shaped piece of cardboard with the number 25, 50, 75 and 100 in the respective corners. You hung it in a front window so that the number of pounds of ice you wanted was "right-side up." If you forgot to put the sign up, you wouldn't get ice and might lose food through spoilage. The other thing to remember was to empty the "drip pan," usually nightly. This was a pan placed under the ice box to collect the water from the melting ice. When no one emptied the drip pan, it overflowed and there was a mess to clean up. In Ravenswood (See *The Teen Years*), we had a hole in the floor which let the water run out onto the ground below.

Refrigeration was invented in the early 1900s, but was not in general use until the 1930s at the earliest. I don't really remember a refrigerator in Mom's and Dad's home until after WWII. Refrigeration was used to produce ice in blocks of convenient size and delivered, usually by horse drawn wagons. The ice was protected from the heat by

burlap bags. In many places, the ice was cut from frozen rivers. I described this, in my account of staying at Grandpa's and Grandma's house in Shelby, Indiana.

While mechanical refrigeration eliminated the task of emptying the drip pan, it brought another chore – defrosting. Moisture accumulated on the freezing coils and eventually hampered the operation of the unit even to the extent that the freezer compartment door could not be opened. Removing this mass of ice required emptying the freezer compartment and letting the ice melt. This was usually accelerated by placing pans of boiling water in the compartment. Needless to say, the removal of the excess water from the melted frost was part of this new problem. Frost free refrigerators were not introduced until the 1950s.

In the 1920s, the milk man brought milk to your door, usually according to a standing order. In the winter, if you didn't bring it in soon after delivery, it froze and a column of pure cream about two inches long stood up out of the bottle. The cap popped off easily as it was just a waxed cardboard circle forced down around the lip of the bottle and pressed into the top to a depth of about 1/4 inch. Generally, we didn't buy coffee cream. The milk bottles were made with a restriction in the neck and there was a special spoon designed to slip down to close off the milk below so cream could be poured off the top. Homogenized milk came along much later.

A pungent memory has to do with garbage disposal. The city had a fleet of wagons, pulled by horses, which came by to pick up the garbage. These wagons were pretty messy and had a terrible odor. Both the garbage and the horses attracted flies. This was the origin of the old riddle: "What has four wheels and flies?" There was even competition among garbage haulers. That was because garbage was collected and sold to farmers for feeding to pigs. Because of the cheap food supply, pigs were known as the "mortgage lifters" in those days. I don't know why, as a city kid, I knew that. This practice became illegal later when it was discovered that it spread trichinosis.

Another horse-drawn vehicle that populated the alleys was the that of the "rag man." These men were the recyclers of those days. They came around frequently, buying old rags, pieces of metal, etc. We didn't pay them to take such things away, they paid us.

Maybe because Sunday's breakfasts were never a favorite of mine, Saturday mornings stand-out. That was when we went to the City Market

at Market and Alabama, not too far from the 10th street houses. There we bought Mackerel. Mackerel is a particularly tasteless fish, especially when cooked primarily in plain water and served with stewed potatoes on Sunday morning.

Another vivid memory has to do with “home brew.” During WWI, as a result, people said, of so many men being away in the army, the prohibitionists got the 18th Amendment (Prohibition) passed. This, of course, didn’t stop drinking; just made it an undercover operation with “rum running” and “Speakeasies.” As I recall, it wasn’t illegal to make your own beer. One of my earliest memories is of a ceramic crock, holding about 10 gallons of fluid. It stood behind the swinging door between the dining room and the kitchen. It was used by Dad to make home brew, a beer of unknown alcoholic content. The crock was always covered with a cloth to keep it clean and from evaporating during the brewing process. There was always a kind of foam on the top which was skimmed off before bottling.

Dad had a supply of bottles and his own capper. When the beer was ready a siphon hose was put in the vat. A little suction started the beer flowing. It also provided a taste to verify that it was good. The outlet of the hose had to be kept below the level at which the beer entered it to keep it flowing. The hose was placed in the neck of a bottle and filled it. Then it was pinched shut and moved to another bottle. When the bottles were all filled they were capped to preserve the fluid.

Uncle John, actually my Mother’s uncle, John Whelan, was a frequent guest. His wife, Aunt Margaret, didn’t approve of his beer drinking. I don’t know that it was ever proved, but one day Dad got a call from a friend in the police department that because of a complaint, they would be “raiding” the house and he thought the complainant was Aunt Margaret. A neighbor was called over to help eliminate the beer before the police came. The vivid memory I referred to at the start of this tale is remembering Dad and the neighbor, standing in the basement by the laundry tubs, each opening two bottles of beer at a time. One bottle was emptied down the drain and one was emptied down their throats! I can see this yet. I wish I had paid as much attention to other aspects of my early life.

After the 1928 Edition of the city directory (data from 1927) Dad didn’t have a listed position until 1930 when he was listed as a barber. I have difficulty giving an accurate chronology to some events in this period. But I am pretty sure

they happened after Great Grandmother Whelan’s death. First, Dad slipped on a pile of gravel while working as a switchman and lost two toes when they were run over a freight car. I suppose he was lucky he wasn’t killed. I suppose he wasn’t able to work as a switchman after that. I would like to find out what compensation he received, if any. Employers didn’t have much responsibility for injured employees in those days. Also in this period, I got scarlet fever and rheumatic fever. I also had the black measles at some time in this period. A bad aortic valve had been my life long heritage from the rheumatic fever. One or the other of these occurred while Dad was in the hospital. It must have been a tough time for our mother. Dad’s coming home from the hospital was delayed by the house being under quarantine caused by one of these ailments of mine. Some memories of these years include my Dad making a desk for me. In retrospect it seems it was quite large. A rectangular top hinged to swing up to reveal storage space. I recall lining up my books around the edge of the desk top and somehow coming to understand that, while neat, it wasn’t a practical arrangement. I also had some kind of small typewriter. It wasn’t a real typewriter, but had a wheel about 6 inches in diameter with letters around the edge. One chose a letter, then pressed the disc down to imprint the letter.

Another recollection is Dad coming home from work and whittling tiny canoes out of tree branches. Also, I think it was at the Cornell Street address where brother Bob was born, I was pulling brother “Holy” in a wagon and dropped the tongue on my foot, cutting my toe. On one occasion, Holy fell backwards out a window and landed in a bush, breaking his fall.

On one occasion in those pre-teen years, Dad had an automobile accident. I remember this as occurring along Fall Creek Boulevard in Indianapolis. He apparently lost control of the car and careened across a lawn crashing into a brick wall. He never drove after that.

By the time I finished the sixth grade, I was judged not to need the Theodore Potter Fresh Air School any more. I must have been twelve and that was the time we moved to Ravenswood, a northern suburb of Indianapolis.

My early life went by so fast
I've little here to mention
Perhaps I had a splendid past
But didn't pay attention