

PARRISH Bessie

Submitted by Debbie Schleiffer, daughter of Margaret Ann (Cox) Erdevig

PARRISH – Bessie Laurena Parrish was one of two sets of twins born to Pethuel and Celestia (Ferris) Parrish, parents to 11 children. Bessie and her twin sister Jessie were the youngest in the family, born on October 16, 1882. Unfortunately, Jessie died at the age of 17 when she stubbed her toe and developed gangrene. Remarkably, Lizzie and Lucy, a second set of twins had been born five years earlier. Everyone recalled Celestia hollering “Lizzie, Lucy, Bessie, Jessie, SaDEE” in one breath!

Bessie graduated from Toulon Academy in 1900. She received a leather-bound book of poetry as a gift inscribed by “an old school teacher”, Elsie J. Mawbey. The commencement invocation that year was given by Rev. Leonard F. Cullom, minister of Toulon Methodist Church. In 1901, Bessie married the minister’s son, Charles Frances “Frank” Cullom. They moved to Kewanee on Lakeview Avenue in a house that still stands. A brief marriage bore both a boy and a girl; only the girl survived infancy. Madelin Lenore was born on March 26, 1908. Bessie took Madelin and returned to her parents.

Bessie later married Harold “Harry” N. Draper on Christmas Eve of 1915. Harry became a two-term mayor in Toulon, a 56-year Masonic Lodge member and served on the Toulon school board for 12 years. They inherited the old Cole house on North Henderson Street where they lived for decades.

Madelin graduated from Toulon Township High School in May 1925. In college, love swept her into a “shocking” elopement to Ray Wilbur Cox late in 1927. Madelin was 19. A baby was born to them just four months later. The baby’s grandfather, Reverend Cullom, christened the child into the Methodist faith.

Madelin and Ray first set up house in the Ballentine apartments on East Main Street and then in the John McCall house southeast of town. Their four children were Margaret Ann, Roland “Bud” Ray, Marilyn Bess and Carol Jean. Their marriage was turbulent and Ray abandoned his family. Because **Madeline** was a talented piano student of Mrs. Irene Nowlan, she sometimes worked nights as a ragtime bar piano player much to her mother’s chagrin though mostly she worked as a typist. Margaret Ann and Marilyn Bess were later sent to live with Bessie and Harry to make ends meet.

Redheaded Margaret Ann grew up barefoot and happy in Toulon. Though poor as “church mice”, eating mustard sandwiches to survive without their father, the family held strong through hard times. Margaret Ann grew very tall and her long legs could run faster than any boy in school. She wanted to win a sports ribbon for her school but was barred from the track. Always an excellent student, her flaming hair and renowned Cox ears were easily recalled.

Margaret Ann studied fine arts at the University of Illinois. She also worked for Bell Telephone in Champaign, Illinois. A brief marriage to Neilson Cumming, Jr. in 1949 left her divorced at age 23. In 1954 Margaret Ann met a handsome widower. When she married Daniel Henry Erdevig, Jr. on Christmas Eve, she became an instant mother to his infant and toddler girls. Two years later, I was born, Debra Jo. A son rounded out the family, Daniel Henry, III, in 1958.

Margaret Ann loved Old Settler Reunions as a child and adult. Today I continue that family tradition with interest and pride by attending reunions too.

1. Margaret Ann Cox, age 4,
dressed for the 1932 Old Settlers Parade



1928 four generation photo:

Baby Margaret Ann Cox, age 9 months

Mother, Madelin Lenore (Cullom) Cox, age 20

Grandmother, Bessie Laurena (Parrish-Cullom) Draper, age 46 (Ten Commandments necklace)

Great grandmother, Celestia (Ferris) Parrish, age 86

