

BROTHER BILL
By
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Brother Bill

These recollections will recall the boyhood and early manhood of Bill Eichelberger. It will not be an attempted biography . It is a look at the influences that molded his personality and a reflection of the kind of man he grew up to be.

In August of 1901 a dividend was declared by the merger of Mary Sweet and Allie Eichelberger. The new arrival was christened William Sweet Eichelberger, in honor of Grandpa Sweet. This name set the precedent of naming all of their children after family member past and present.

Lucky was any kid born to have Saxton as a place to grow up in. There were places to fish and places to swim. In the fall, there were woods where berries could be picked or chestnuts could be gathered. In the winter there were ponds and the river to skate and an wonderful hill to go sledding on. There were places to hike and places to camp.

Holidays were big events in those days. Memorial Day came first and our front porch was draped with Red, White and Blue bunting and flags. Grandpa Eichelberger always came down from Everett to march with the G.A.R. veterans and the Sunday School kids to decorate the graves of all former Union soldiers with flowers and fresh American flags.

July Fourth was even more of a child's holiday, We kids saved our nickels to buy firecrackers and sparklers at Billy Bryan's rocket store. There were ball games and refreshment stands. The boasted no fireworks displays, but my Dad made up for it.

At dusk he brought out an assortment of pinwheels and skyrockets in front of our house. Then he launched big paper balloons inflated by cotton and alcohol. It was a thrill to watch each one rise in the air and float out of sight over the ridges. Eventually these balloons were outlawed after one landed on a farmer's haystack and set it afire.

Christmas was always big in our household. We kids had no share in decorating the Christmas tree; that job was reserved for old Saint himself. It was a glorious vision for us to see in the morning. One time Bill looked out the bedroom window and insisted he saw Santa clause in a sled across in front of the hardware store. Eli and I accepted that as a fact, and Bill felt he was one the few who had actually seen old Santa.

Happy as those times were, Mother saw to it that we boys were assigned our share of the household chores. All cooking was done on a big black range, and Bill's job was to get the fire ready to light in the mornings. He fixed it with newspapers, kindling, and lumps of coal. On Saturdays Bill did the outdoor scrubbing our two porches and steps down to the front walk. My assignment was the kitchen and nursery linoleum floors and the steps down to the basement .

When Bill was ten or eleven, Dad bought us a pony, "Colonel" who was a beautiful animal with reddish brown coloring and white patches on the side. He arrived with a two seater buggy and a single seat. Bill took over the responsibility of feeding and watering Colonel and curry him

every day while I inherited the task of feeding the chickens and gathering the eggs.

Bill had a special knack as an innovator. His gang was maybe a year or two older than he was, but it was always Bill who organized the outdoor camping or the impromptu plays given in our stable. Again it was Bill who started the Boy Scouts, as head of the Eagle patrol. The eight member met every Monday night in the basement of the Reformed Church and then marched proudly with a drum and flag down to Dr. C.O. Miller's office for an demonstration in first aid. It was about that time that Vernon Herbster moved to Saxton as agent for Victrolas. The Herbsters were childless but he soon became the first scoutmaster. Money for uniforms and equipment was scarce, so a benefit concert was arranged with the Boy Scout band of Lewistown.