

Small Town, Smaller World



Headline from the August 25, 1908 issue of the Monroe Evening Times

I often hear in conversations around town that it is a small world when we talk about who is related to whom. Of course, it is a small world; we live in a county with less than 40,000 people. You will see as you read this article how circumstances really do make the entire world seem small.

The Monroe Evening Times reported on June 25 and 29, 1908 that Willis Ludlow and two of his children, Evelyn and Harris, would be leaving for New York and then sail to Switzerland to meet Mrs. Ludlow and Hattie. The five of them were to then have “a two months’ sojourn abroad.”

I didn’t see (or didn’t write anything down) anything more about their trip until August 25 when it was reported that Edwin had received a letter from his brother. Willis wrote that while he was walking down the street in Interlaken, he had a chance meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Edward Ruegger. Neither knew that “the other was in the town, or in Switzerland for that matter, until they met on the Hoheweg.” Hoheweg was the principal avenue in Interlaken, which is a noted summer resort in Switzerland. Mrs. Ludlow and Hattie were with Willis and all three enjoyed a visit with the Ruegger couple at a hotel. Ludlow also wrote that he had met Dr. Q. O. Sutherland of Janseville while they were in Amsterdam.

I know that many of our local residents have traveled there and will appreciate the following information from the article. “Interlaken is a town of 2,000 inhabitants, lying twenty-seven miles from Berne, the capital of the republic. The town is situated on the river Aare and lies between Lakes Thun and Brienz.”

The Rueggers had toured in Switzerland, Germany, and France. They sailed for America on August 18 and were expected to arrive back in Monroe about September 1. The Ludlow family had traveled in Italy, Switzerland, Germany France, and England. They were to leave for the United States “in a few days” and were expected to arrive home about September 14. They came “on the Lusitania, of the Canard line, the fastest passenger steamer on the Atlantic.

Willis, his wife, Hattie, and Harris arrived home on Saturday night, September 12, having made the trip from Queenstown to New York on the Lusitania. The ship left at 9:31 Sunday morning and landed in New York early Friday morning. The ship left England two hours earlier than usual in an effort to establish herself as a four-day boat, but took four days and sixteen hours.

The New York World of September 11 stated, “Rough seas and heavy weather were responsible for the huge turbine engines failing to drive the Lusitania across the Atlantic in new record time.” It had set a record-breaking pace of 26 knots an hour having logged 68 miles by noon on Sunday. It seemed they might set a new ocean record, but the big turbine-propelled ship began “shoving her nose into heavy head seas” that night, which proved a serious handicap to the powerful engines.

Even though the big turbines were not able to break a speed record, the Lusitania was able to make a new passenger mark for herself. Every available stateroom was occupied on this trip with many prominent people on board including Vernon H. Brown, the New York agent of the Cunard line. On this trip the ship carried a total of more than 900 cabin passengers plus another 900 in the steerage [which provided accommodations for the passengers with the cheapest tickets].

RMS Lusitania was a British ocean liner that was sunk on 7 May 1915 by a German U-boat off the southern coast of Ireland. The sinking occurred about two years before the United States declared war on Germany. Much of the front page of the Monroe Evening Times that day was concerned with the incident. The large headline said that the Lusitania had been torpedoed. The smaller headline stated that all passengers were reported safe with many prominent Americans among the 1,388 on board. Unfortunately, that report was not true and 1,198 passengers and crew were killed.

A small article, also on the front page, said that, "Mr. and Mrs. Willis Ludlow, of this city, and their daughter, Mrs. Horace Lozier, of Glen Ellyn, Ill., were passengers on the Lusitania on their return voyage from Europe six years ago last September. So far as known, they are the only Monroe persons who have ever taken passage on the ill-fated liner."