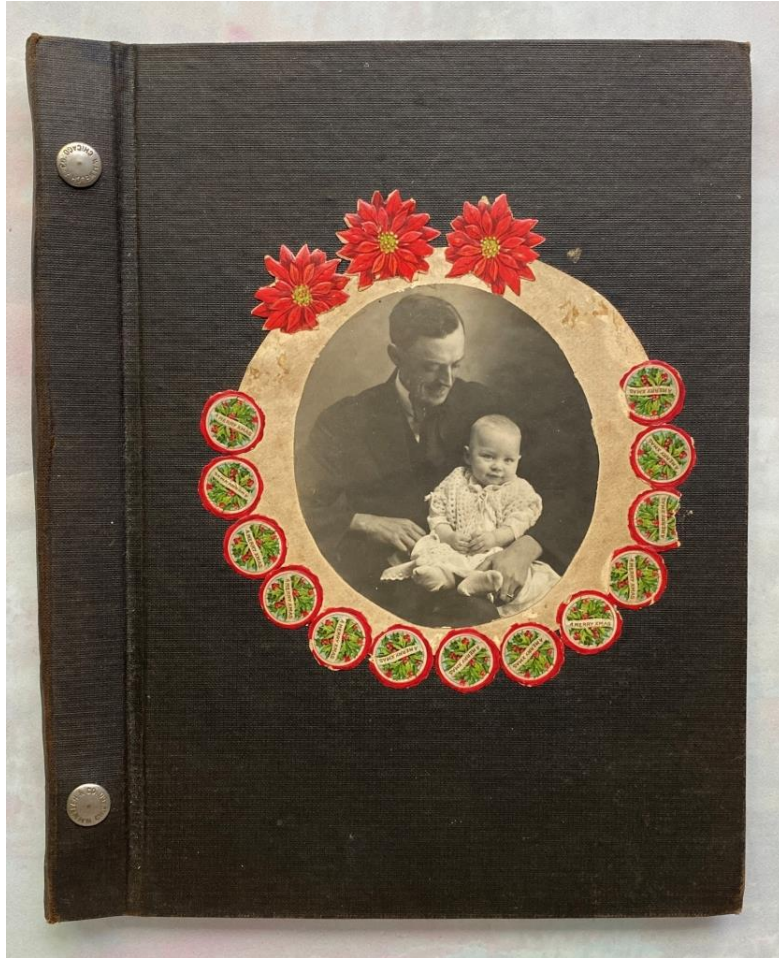
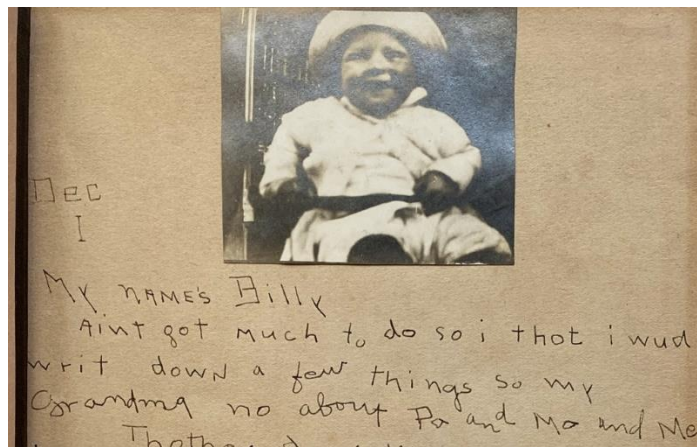


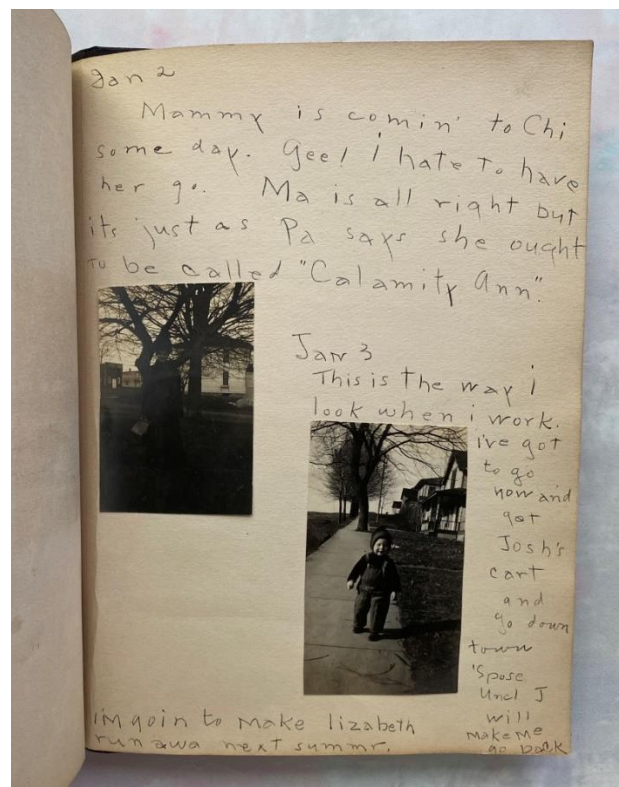
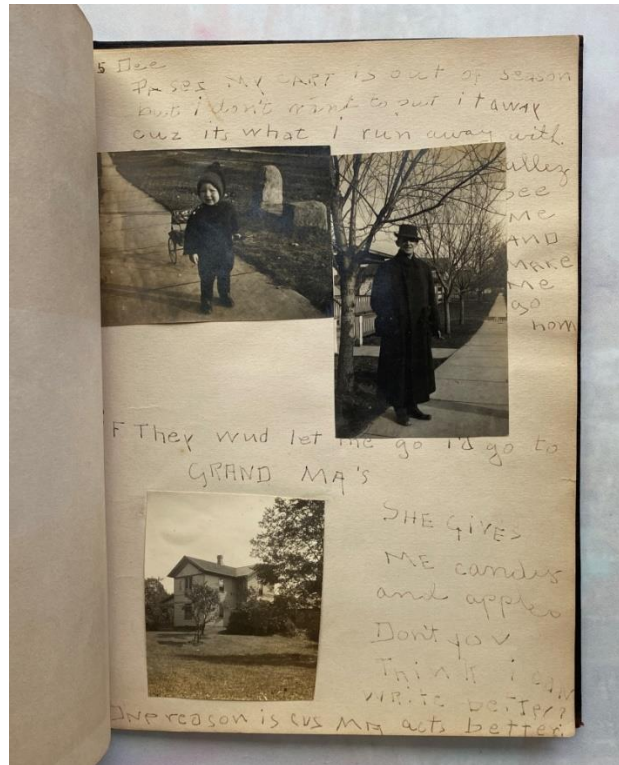
## PWF Special: William “Billy” Post from Fennville, Michigan



Today I have a very special blogpost for you. **Mandy** from *Paper of the Past* reached out to me with this photo diary of little Billy. If you don't know Mandy's website [paperofthepast.com](http://paperofthepast.com) or her instagram [@paperofthepast](https://www.instagram.com/paperofthepast), you've missed out on something fantastic. Her collection of 500+ vintage scrapbooks from as early as the 1840s is like a virtual museum to marvel at!

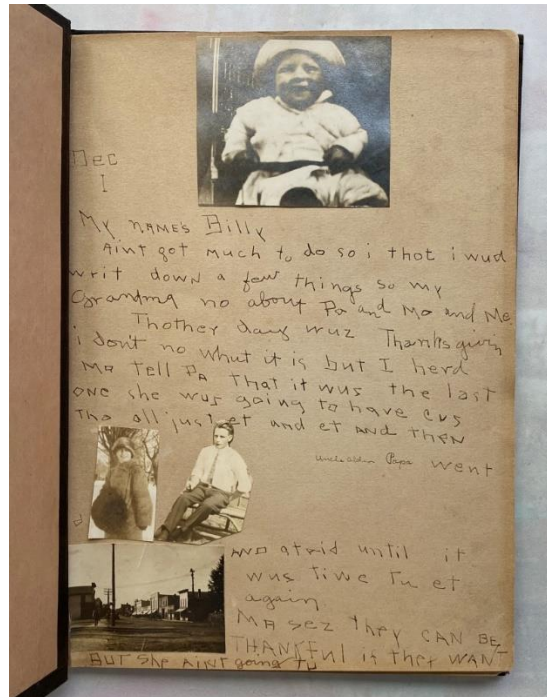


*"Dec 1. My name's Billy. Ain't got much to do so I thought I would write down a few things so my Grandma knows about Pa and Ma and me."*



Mandy shared the many pages of Billy's diary with me. It was written by Billy's Pa in a way as if it had been written by little Billy himself, including spelling mistakes and childlike observations. And at the same time, Pa spiced up Billy's lines with his own somewhat bold sense of irony:

*"The other day was Thanksgiving. I don't know what it is but I heard Ma tell Pa that it was the last one. She was going to have (...?) all just ate and ate and then went (edit: streetview photo) and stayed until it was time to eat again. Ma says they can be thankful if they want but she ain't going to."*



My understanding is that the diary was written in December 1913 through January 1914 and was probably meant as a Christmas gift for Billy's Chicago Grandma.

Mandy was curious who Billy and his family were. Billy drops little clues like a trail of breadcrumbs in the forest, and the photos, glued into the diary, complete this perfect genealogical puzzle. There is Billy's Ma and Pa, Grandma Barron and Chicago Grandma, Uncle Alden, Aunt Kat, Aunt Edith, Uncle Josh, Hebe, and Richard are some of the names he mentions. So, I put on my detective hat, took out my magnifying glass, and photo by photo, sentence by sentence, we set off to solve the mystery.

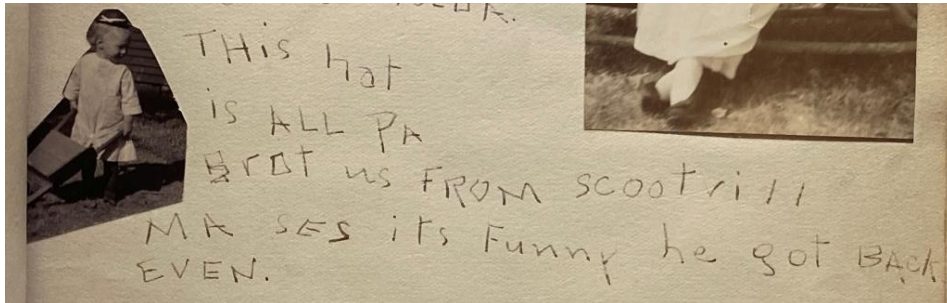
My first quest was to find out where Billy's family was living at the time. One of Billy's grannies was referred to as Chicago Grandma. In one of the photos (of Billy's Ma?), a building in the background reads Fennville. Did Billy's family live in Fennville, Allegan, in Michigan?





Billy writes on Dec 10:

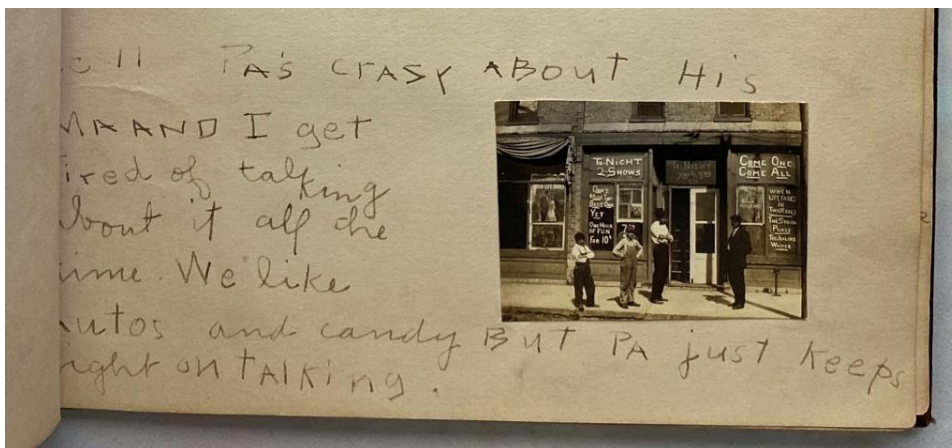
*"This hat is all Pa brought us from "Scootvill". Ma says it's funny he got back even."*



"Scootvill" could have been Scottville in Michigan. Fennville is just 110 miles from Scottville and 140 miles from Chicago.

Then Billy writes about shows and cinema on Dec 11:

*"Pa's crazy about his (cine)ma and I get tired of talking about it all the time. We like (.utos) and candy but Pa just keeps right on talking."*



And on Dec 13:

*"Pa's talking show again. He has started a baby show. Cause they're nice but if I was in it they wouldn't get no teddy, would they, grandma?"*

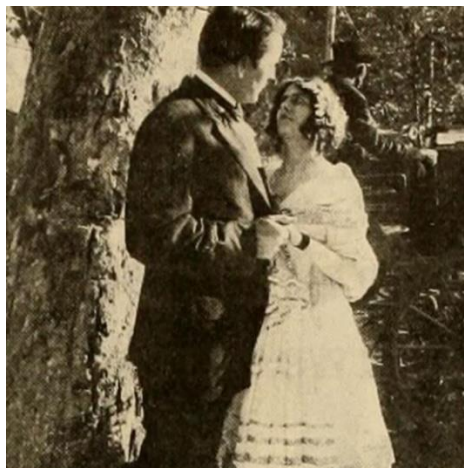
And then on December 24:

*"Pa is going to have his show Christmas night."*

Was there a movie theatre in Fennville and could Billy's Pa have been the owner? I did a little digging and found some info on the webpages of [Cinema Treasures](#) and [Water Winter Wonderland](#) that the old movie theatre *Dreamland Theatre* opened in Fennville in 1913 and was sold a little later by Ward Post to Joseph Hespel who operated the theatre until 1932 when it was sold to Clifford Smith and renamed *Our Theater*. Was one of those men Billy's father then?



The silent movies shown at the theatre – “When Life Fades”, “The Stolen Purse” and “The Jealous Waiter” all came out in February 1913. I even found the photo in one of the movie posters, “When Life Fades” (1913) by Francis Ford, starring Francis Ford and Elmer Morrow:



Source: [IMDB](https://www.imdb.com)

On to the next clue – Billy refers to her other grandma as **Grandma Barron**:

*“PS Say grandma Barron is coming to Chicago two days after Christmas. They will telephone you.”*

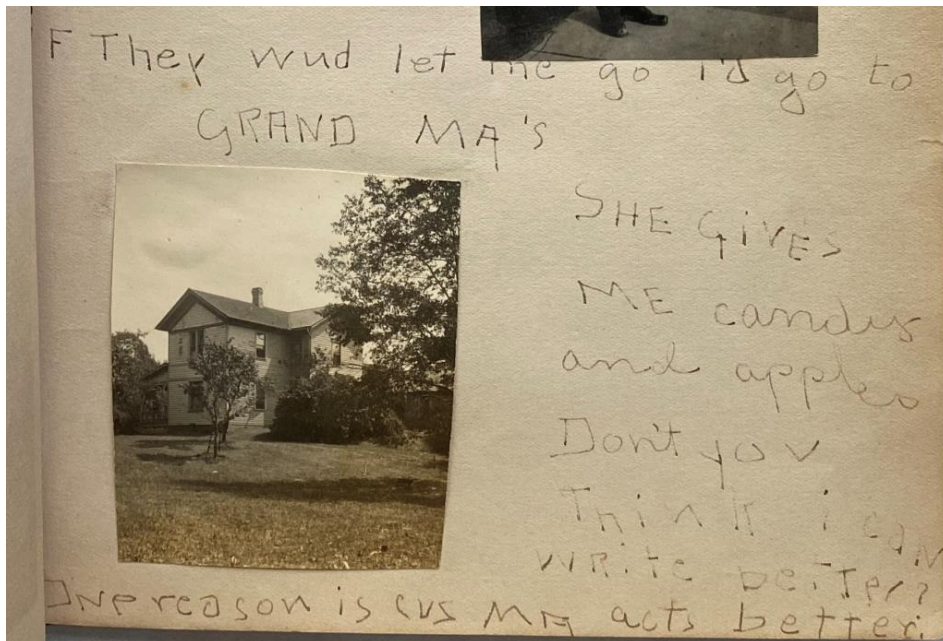
It sounds like **Grandma Barron** lived nearby, and so it seems did his **Uncle Alden** (more about him later). And Mandy found one Alden James Barron (1881-1962) from Fennville. He was the older brother of Zelda Barron (1883-1932). **Zelda Barron** married **Ward William Post** in 1908 in Fennville, the same Ward Post who owned the Fennville cinema in 1913! And they had a son, **William Post**. We had found Billy and his parents!!!

And now we were on a roll! We then found Billy’s birth date which was January 25, 1912.

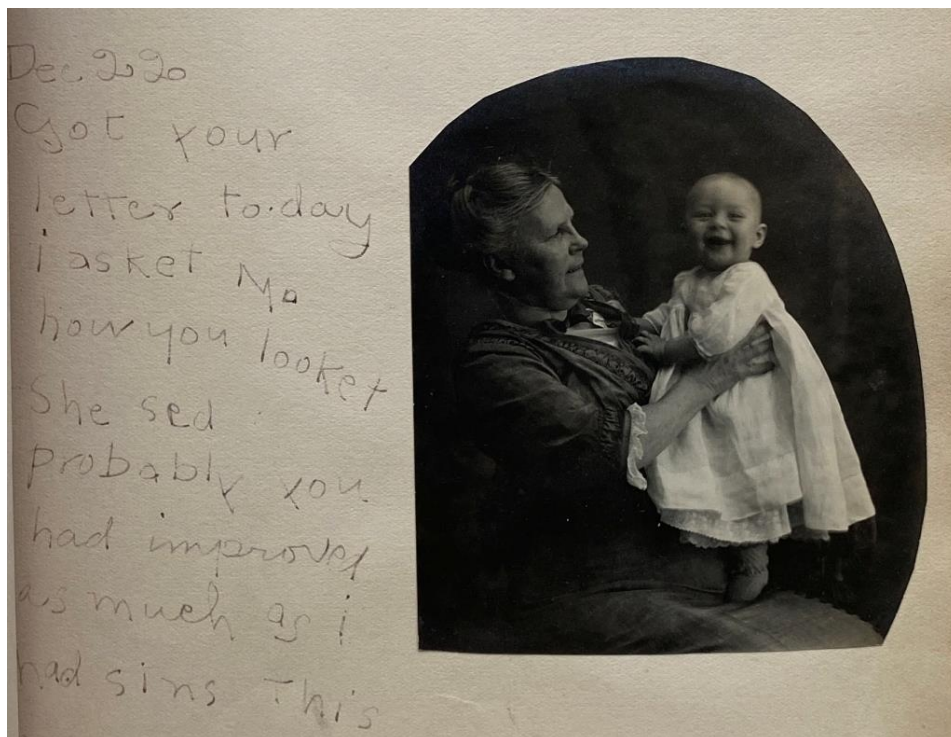


Billy had two grandmas who spoilt him rotten:

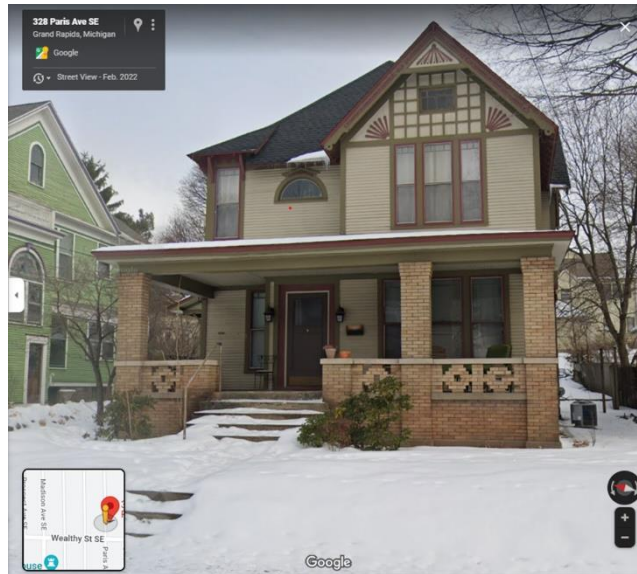
"If they would let me go, I'd go to grandma's. She gives me candies and apples."



Billy's Pa, **Ward William Post**, had been born 1883 in Auburn, Indiana, to parents George H. Post and **Josephine Post née Gorrell** (1860-1930). In 1908, his widowed mother Josephine was living in Chicago. She was Billy's Chicago Grandma, here with her grandson Billy:



Chicago Grandma was one tough lady. She was widowed in 1898 when Billy's Pa was just 15. In 1900, she was working as a nurse. In 1910, she was living with Billy's Ma and Pa, perhaps in this house at 328 Paris Avenue, in Grand Rapids, Michigan:



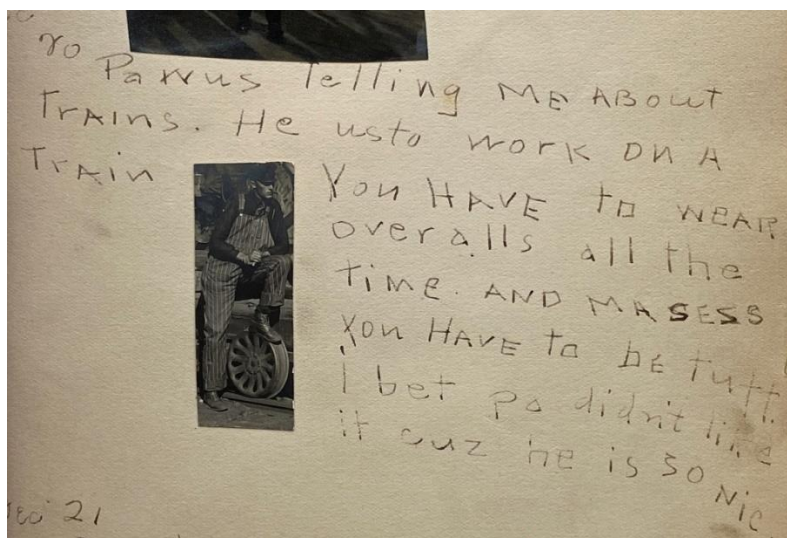
Source: GoogleMaps

By 1920, Chicago Grandma had moved with Billy's Uncle Cleon and Aunt Edith all the way to Snohomish County in Washington, near Seattle, to take up employment as the matron at YWCA. She passed away in 1930. I assume she was fun to be around, as Billy reveals on Dec 25:

*"Say, gee! If you was only here! I know you'll have a good time. Ma says you know how to."*

Sadly, Billy never got to know his grandpas. Like Grandpa Post, Grandpa John Barron had passed away before his birth, too. In 1910, **Grandma Alice Barron née Johnson** was living in Clyde, about 5 miles from Fennville. In 1920, Grandma Barron was living next door to Ma and Pa and Billy in Maple Street in Clyde. And by 1930, they had all moved back to Fennville and were living together in one household. Grandma Barron passed away in December 1932 from pneumonia.

Before Billy's Pa got into the movie business, he was working as a rail wagon brakeman. Billy writes about trains on Dec 20:

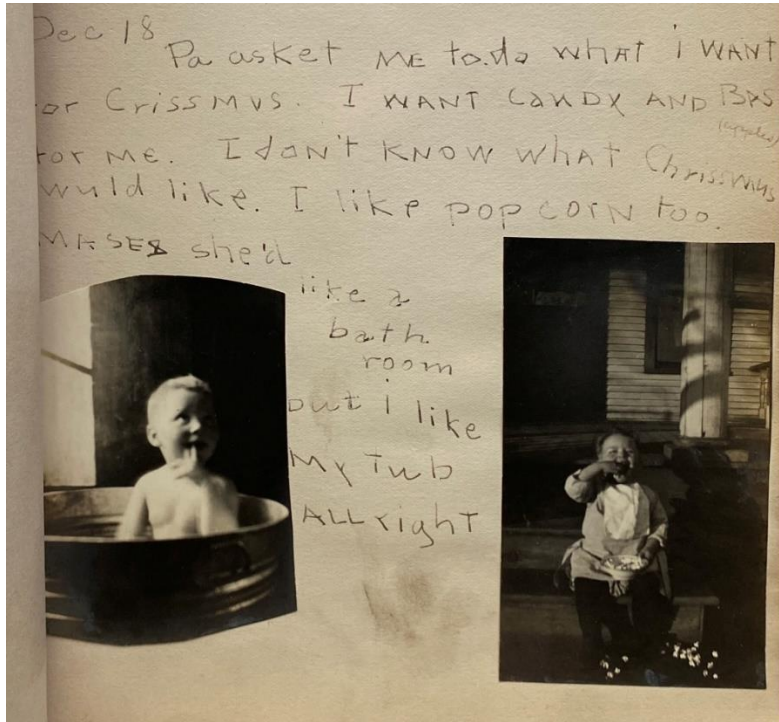


*"Pa was telling me about trains. He used to work on a train. You have to wear overalls all the time and Ma says you have to be tough. I bet Pa didn't like it cause he is so nice."*

I wondered why Pa sold the cinema if he loved it so much. Perhaps because WWI broke out and he was drafted in 1917? After his military service, he continued to work on trains, as a conductor.



Billy's Ma Zelda was the driving force of the family, always busy doing something, taking care of the household, of little Billy, of family dinners and celebrations. When Pa asked Billy on Dec 18, what he would like for Christmas, Ma throws in that she'd like a bathroom. I sense a bit of frustration in that remark.

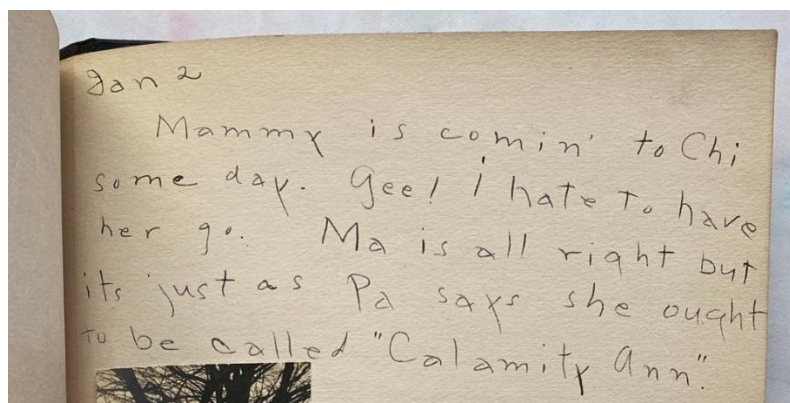


"Pa asked me today what I want for Christmas. I want candy and bas (apples) for me. I don't know what Christmas would like. I like popcorn too. Ma says she'd like a bathroom but I like my tub alright." "Ma just rushes around so I can't keep up. Christmas is after her again I guess. Wish I knew what it's like. Bet when I get big I won't let it bother her," Billy writes on Dec 14.

Christmas stressed poor Ma out. Billy writes on Dec 23:

"Ma is awful tired so I keep still as I can. Afraid she won't get Christmas done."

Billy goes on to write on Jan 2:



"Mammy is coming to Chicago some day. Gee! I hate to have her go. Ma is all right but it's just as Pa says she ought to be called "Calamity Ann"."



Pa, the film buff, throws in a silent movie reference here. “Calamity Anne” was a popular Western movie character of the time, a tough woman who was both a villain and had a big heart. Ma’s looks could have easily made her a silent movie star – those stunning eyes...!



Billy lost his Ma mum when he was 20 years old. Ma Zelda died of abdominal cancer in August 1932. Just 5 months later, Grandma Barron passed away. 1932 was a tough year for young Billy.

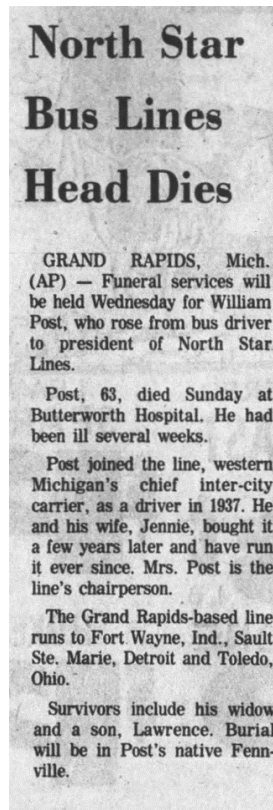
Billy joined the North Star Bus Lines, a Michigan bus company, as a bus driver in 1937.

He married Jennie Rosella Woodruff Meng in 1941. At the time they got married, Jennie was 34 and widowed, and Jennie had a 8-year-old son Lawrence Meng from her previous marriage. He was mentioned in Billy’s obituary from 1975 as his surviving son. I guess he raised Lawrence as his own. There are photos of Billy and Jennie in a public family tree on Ancestry. They looked stunning!



Photos courtesy of the public family tree on Ancestry

Billy died in 1975, and Jenny in 1999, son Lawrence in 2020. Billy's [obituary](#) is full of valuable information too. Apparently, he rose from bus driver to president of the North Star Bus Lines. He and Jennie bought the company, and Jennie was the chairperson!



Link: [newspapers.com](http://newspapers.com)

This is already a loooooong blogpost, but I also want to write about some of the people and buildings Billy mentions.

From Uncle Alden's [obituary](#), published in *The Herald-Palladium* on March 4, 1963, I learnt that **James Alden Barron** founded the Fennville fruit exchange and Glenn Shores Golf Club which he managed until 1946. Uncle Alden was married to **Katherine née Gafford**, Billy's "Aunt Kat" whose home housed the family's Christmas tree in 1913, as Billy writes on Dec 24:

*"I got to get up awful early cause I'm going down to Aunt Kat's house to the Christmas tree. Then we are going to dinner to grandma's. Then all the folks are coming to our house to get their presents. Then go to the show. Don't you suppose I will be tired and Ma – well I don't dare think about it."*

There is a photo of Uncle Alden on page 1 of Billy's diary:



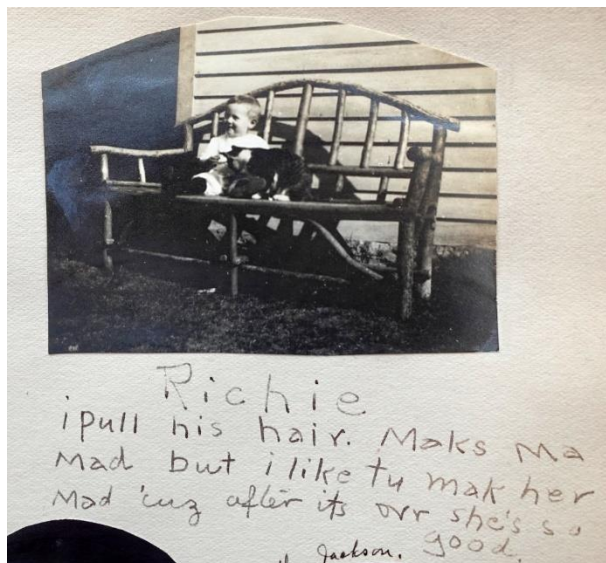
Billy writes on Jan 10:

*"I went down to see uncle Alden today. Richard was there. Richie is funny, grandma. He don't like to have me pull his hair. Uncle Alden gave us a penny and we went to the store and got some candy."*



Richard must have been Uncle Alden and Aunt Kat's son **Richard Gafford Barron**, born on February 25, 1912, in Fennville, just a month later than Billy. From his [obituary](#), published in the *The Herald-Palladium* on June 2, 1966, we can read that Richard started working for the Michigan Fruit Canners Inc. in 1934 and rose up the career ladder to its vice president of customer service. I wonder if this was the company his father had founded. He died suddenly at just 54 years of age, surviving were his widow Lois, daughter Jacqueline, sons James Alden and William Richard, a sister Mrs. Lloyd Wark, and brother Allan E. Barron.

Oh, and Billy didn't pull little Richard's hair. Richie was a cat :). There is another photo of Billy and kitty Richie in the diary:



*"Richie. I pull his hair. Makes Ma mad but I like to make her mad cause after it's over she's so good."*  
Billy writes about Aunt Edith on Jan 1:



*“Aunt Edith gave me Napoleon. I carry him cause if he walks, he’s so slow.”*



Aunt Edith, or **Edith Post née Fosdick** was the wife of Pa's brother **Cleon Winfield Post**, Billy's uncle. Cleon and Edith had got married in 1901 in Fennville and I don't think they had any children. There is a photo of Aunt Edith, her sister Elva and their mother Mina in a [public tree on Ancestry](#). Aunt Edith was also the link to the photo of the twins May and Fay in Billy's diary. These were Aunt Edith's nieces.



May and Fay were most probably the twins of Charles and Eva Fosdick from Fennville, Michigan. The twins were born on June 23, 1912, in Fennville. Fay's full name was **Faith Loran Fosdick** and May's was **Mary Fosdick**. In 1920 and 1930, the twins were living with their parents and 4 other siblings in Manlius, Allegan. Fay married James Donald Barnes, and had at least 3 children: Donald Jr., Mary Faith and Jack. May married Ernest Vandenberg and they had two children: Bernard and Marjorie.



The **Florence Beagle** in this photo was the oldest daughter of Samuel James Beagle and Ida Virginia née Baker. She was born in about 1909. On June 8, 1911, her baby sister Dorothy Irene Beagle was born in Fennville. 6 more siblings were born after that, but I suppose the “Another Beagle” in the second photo might have been Dorothy Irene, since Billy’s diary is from 1913. Sam Beagle was a mason by profession. In 1910 they were neighbours of Uncle Alden in Clyde! Florence married William C. Harmon in 1944. The couple had a son Bruce Harmon.



I suppose **Arnold Bale** was the boy’s full name, and Bale was not his doggo :). There was one Arnold Leroy Bale who had been born on December 27, 1911, in Fennville, to parents Leroy Claire Bale and Lillian D. née Arnold. In 1920, the parents had separated, and Arnold was living with her mother and grandparents in Clyde. Arnold married Francis née Barlow in 1943. Their marriage announcement in *Star Tribune* of Nov 7, 1943, describes their wedding in Minnesota, followed by their honeymoon to Michigan. Arnold and Francis had several sons. Arnold passed away in March 2001 and was buried as a veteran of WWII in Fort Snelling, Hennepin in Minnesota.



I believe this was **Hughes Hutchinson**, born on January 16, 1912, in Fennville, just days before our Billy. His father Wright J. Hutchinson was a cashier at a bank, and mother Bessie bore her husband at least 5 children. In 1910 and in 1920, Hughes' family was living in Clyde. Hughes married Genevieve "Jean" née Sundstrom in 1934. They had two children, Clark and Ann. Hughes was drafted to the US Army during WWII. At the time, he had been employed with the Michigan Fruit Cannery Inc. Hughes passed away in 2005 and was buried at the Fennville Cemetery.



This cutest baby chubbiness might have been **Charles Arthur Jackson**, born on April 29, 1912 in Ganges, Michigan. His WWII draft card states that "the person who will always know his address" was Mrs. Lola Jackson née Cotton from Fennville. Perhaps she was the connection to Billy's family. Little Arthur (or Charles A. in other records) lost his mum very early in life, in 1916. In 1920, he and his widowed father Albert M. Jackson were living in Ganges, Allegan. In 1930, he and his father were both working as farmers on a general farm in Ganges. In 1940, when Arthur was drafted, he was employed with Interstate Motor Freight Co. in Chicago. I don't know anything else about him.





Bob Rosey was a bit of a challenge to identify. I wonder if Bob was Robert and “Billy” made a spelling mistake with his last name which should read Rose. One **Robert Gerard Rose** was born on August 28, 1912 in Grand Rapids in Michigan to parents Ernest A. and Theresa Rose. In 1920, the big Rose family was living in Grand Rapids. In 1940, he was drafted to the US Army. He married Marion née Hake, and they had two children, James T. and Mary P. Bob passed away in May 1955 and was buried at the Woodlawn Cemetery in Grand Rapids.

There are also a couple of photos of buildings in Billy’s album diary. Remember, when Ma complained at Thanksgiving that she has nothing to be thankful for cause the guests just ate and ate with only a little break when they left to town to this street?



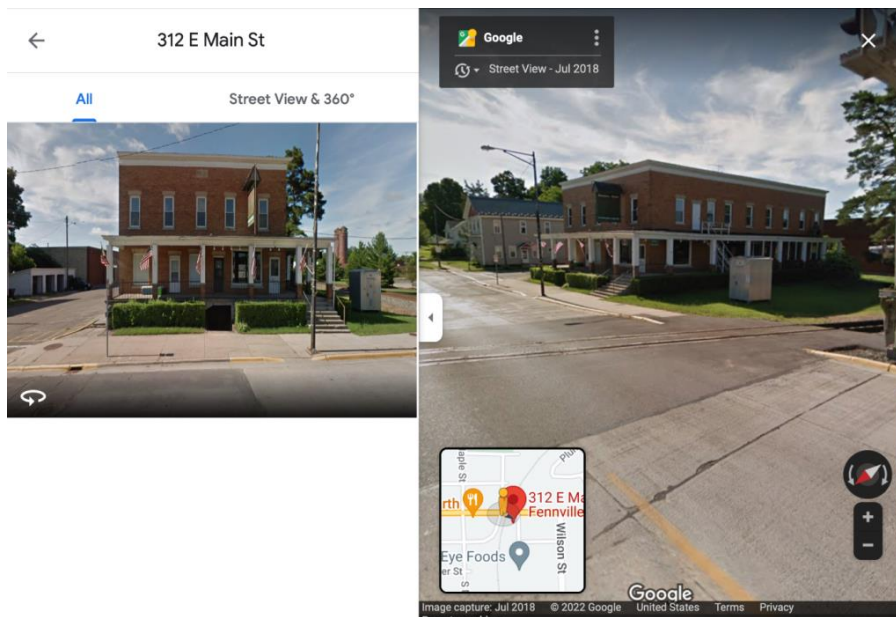
That streetview was of W Main Street in Fennville. Some of the buildings still stand today (Source: GoogleMaps)

Billy writes on Dec 8:

*“Ma’s cross again. You can always tell cause I can’t write straight. Pa says he is going to the (a photo of a building) but I can’t get away.”*



The building still stands there on Main Street in Fennville. Mandy could identify it as the old Stevens hotel.



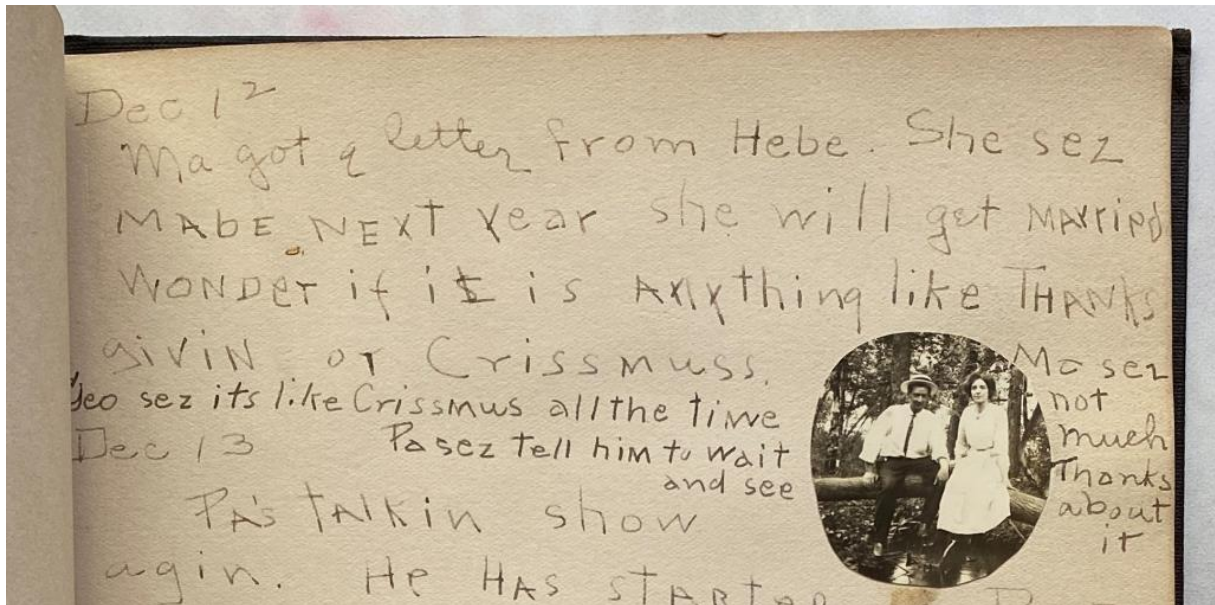
Source: GoogleMaps

There are a few puzzles we have not been able to solve, though:

–Who was **Uncle Josh**? – I haven't found a Josh in Billy's family tree. Perhaps he was Pa's friend or a colleague?

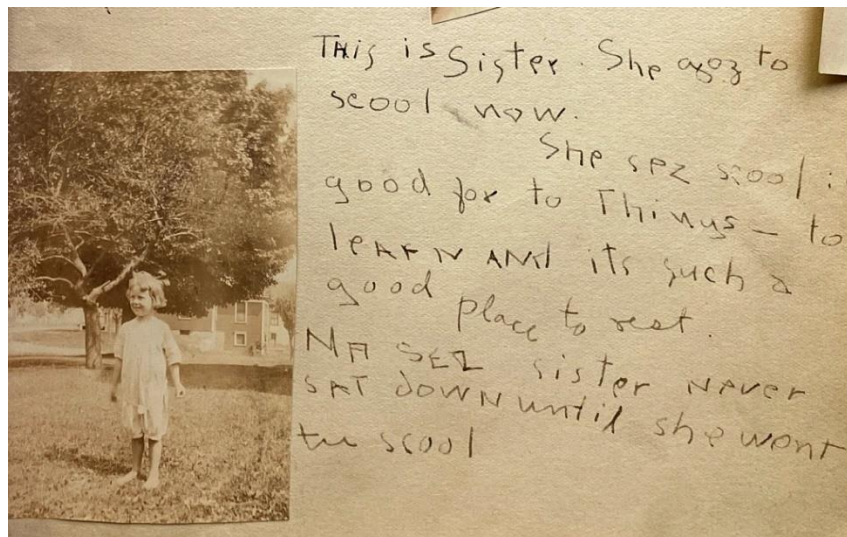


–Who was **Hebe**, whose letter Ma received on Dec 12? Was Hebe her real name or was it short for something else? Pa didn't have any sisters. Was it perhaps a nickname for one of Ma's younger sisters, Alice or Florence? Maybe she was Ma's colleague from her days of teaching? But wouldn't Billy have referred to her as Aunt Hebe then?



"Ma got a letter from Hebe. She says maybe next year she will get married. Wonder if it is anything like Thanksgiving or Christmas. Geo (?) says it's like Christmas all the time. Pa says tell him to wait and see. Ma says not much thanks about it."

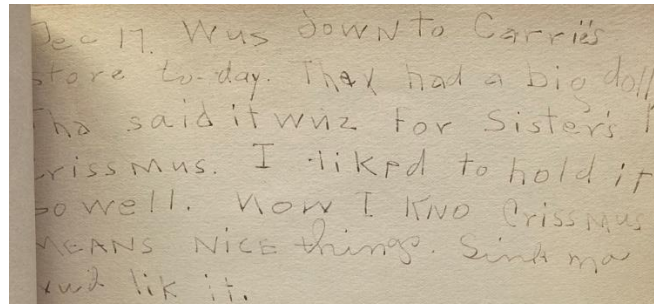
–And the biggest loose end of this diary is if Billy had a **sister** and why we cannot find her in the records? Billy writes about her on Dec 4:



"This is sister. She goes to school now. She says school is good for two things – to learn and it's such a good place to rest. Ma says sister never sat down until she went to school."

And then again on Dec 17 when they visited Carrie's store to pick up a doll for her, Billy writes about her:





*"Was down to Carrie's store today. They had a big doll. Ma (?) said it was for sister's Christmas. I liked to hold it so well. Now I know Christmas means nice things. Think Ma would like it."*

So if Billy's sister was 3-4 years old in December 1913, she should have been born shortly after Pa and Ma got married. But the 1910 Census does not list her, and the 1910 Census also says, Ma Zelda had no children. She is also not to be found in the 1920 Census. Was she born just days after the 1910 Census was taken, and something happened to her before the 1920 Census? But I've found no record of that. Was sister Billy's half-sister instead, a daughter Pa had had in a previous relationship, and she was never living with Billy and his parents? She remains a mystery.

If you're still reading this blogpost, I thank you for your time and patience :). I hope you enjoyed it as much as I enjoyed researching this puzzle Billy left us to solve. I hope one day Billy's relatives or relatives of everyone mentioned in this blogpost stumble upon this blogpost in the world wide web and be pleasantly surprised to find their ancestor's toddler face on the pages of this random photo diary from more than a hundred years ago. Thank you, Mandy, for trusting me with this project. Till next time, everyone!

Photos Without Families, originally shared on [www.photoswithoutfamilies.blog](http://www.photoswithoutfamilies.blog)