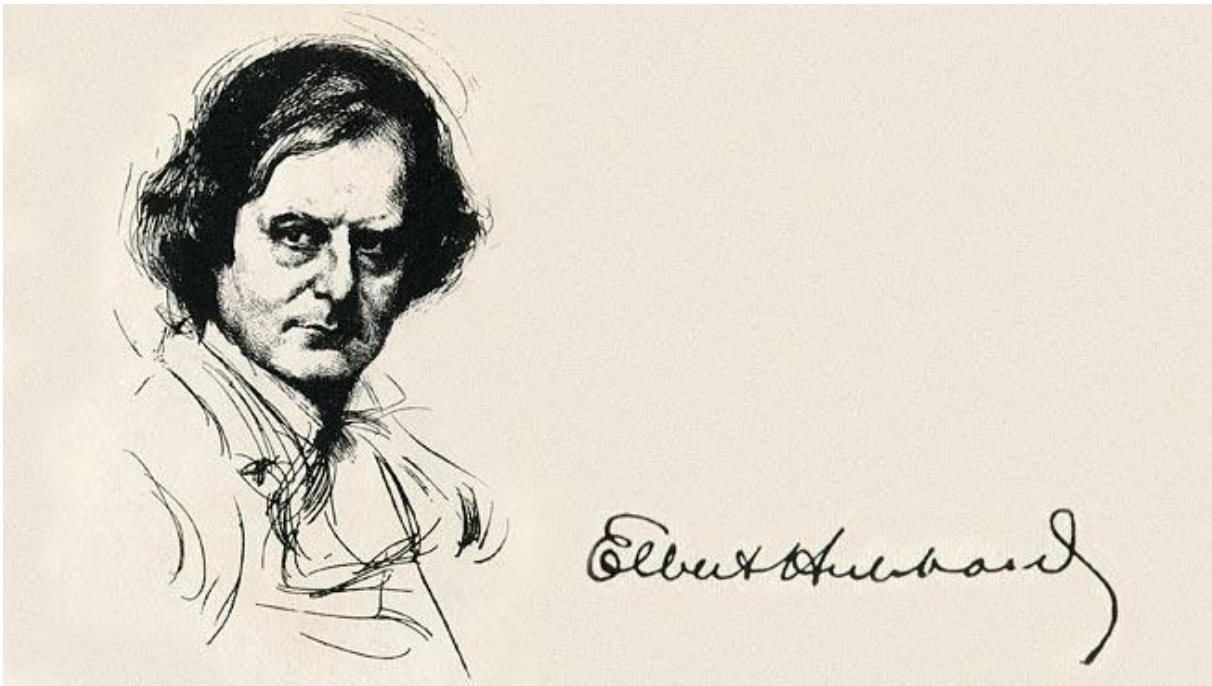


FOUNDING FATHERS: ELBERT HUBBARD (*Continued #8*)

The most charismatic - and also most controversial - of the founders of the Larkin Soap Company (L.S.C.) was Elbert Hubbard who held one-third of the limited stock in the company and became second-in-command.



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Elbert, born in 1856 to Silas and Juliana Hubbard, benefitted from an upbringing by his physician father's and his teacher/mother's commitment to lives of service to those less fortunate than they. The Hubbard's had resided in the Chautauqua area. Dr. Hubbard never earned much money because of his propensity to donate services to the poor. At one point they resided in the Seneca Indian Reservation to serve that community. Later they moved to Illinois where Elbert was born.

A cousin of Elbert, Justus Weller, owned a soap company and was married to John D. Larkin's (J.D.L.) sister, Mary. Fortuitously for J.D.L., Weller hired him as a clerk but he quickly became a partner. It was while working in Chicago that he met Weller's cousin, Frances (Frank), subsequently marrying her and moving back to Buffalo to found L.S.C. It was also in Chicago where he met Frank's brother, Elbert Hubbard, ultimately hiring him because of his creativity and marketing ability already manifested in his teens. Between J.D.L.'s talent for administration and manufacturing, and Elbert's talent for marketing, L.S.C. skyrocketed to success.

Initially Elbert, like Darwin Martin, worked as a salesman. But there were a lot of companies competing in the soap-making business without much to distinguish the product of one company from that of another, other than price. Elbert grasped that problem and developed strategies to make L.S.C.'s products more meritorious of attention. At first Elbert designed attractive advertising circulars, but soon focused on the questionable effectiveness of door-to-door sales. Darwin Martin, then 13, came to work in Buffalo under Elbert's supervision, initially as a bookkeeper but soon as a tool in Elbert's hands to implement his ideas. The record keeping of orders, for example, was one of those projects.

Sample back

IMPORTANT RULES.

All correspondence letters must always be attached in exact order of date, with oldest underneath and latest on top.

Report daily to Division Correspondence File & on form for the purpose all pieces of Correspondence received by you which you transfer to other desk whatsoever. Report must show number and initial, to whom transferred and

Returned unopened

Date shipped *4/22* Premium *Class*

C. B. 290 SPECIAL

F. 107

BLACKBURN MRS. JOHN *OF 4356 AF. 18th CO.

NEW YORK CITY N. Y. 564 SMITH ST.

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RECORDED

Elbert got the idea of customer clubs from his and his wife's Bertha's attendance at the Chautauqua Institute's (founded in 1874) Literary and Science Circle (CLSC), created in 1878. The CLSC had a four-year correspondence course but also reading circles which promoted sharing the cost of books and publications as well as, in general, encouraging a "culture of collective learning." They urged values encompassing moral living and constructive use of leisure time. The Clubs emerged throughout the country including East Aurora, and promoted what they called "The Chautauqua Idea." Elbert's passion for these concepts were inflamed (and so, too, his interest in one of the East Aurora Club's members, Alice Moore.)



Soon Elbert developed the "Larkin Club" program centered around the mail order business. Customers were urged to form clubs of ten housewives as their communities. As a group led by a "secretary," the club would purchase a larger "Great Combination Box" for \$6 (later \$10) each month. The box was filled with many soaps and premiums which were then divided among the members. Presumably other diverse household products could be purchased by the members, as well, selected from the Larkin Catalogs which offered hundreds of products and premiums including china and furniture. The "Secretary" was rewarded for her success in increasing sales with extra premiums and trips. A publication, the "Larkin Idea" was distributed. Members were called "Larkinities." All salesmen and middlemen were eliminated. The L.S.C.'s motto became, "from factory to family." Sales increased from \$220,000 in 1892 to \$15 million in 1906.

Jack Quinan describes Elbert's personality in his Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin Administration Building: Myth and Fact, quoting Elbert's nephew, Horton Heath:

"He laughed easily and loudly. He attacked the day's work with a gusto and excess of convivial spirit that had never been subjected to the sedation of alcohol or tobacco. He occasionally relieved his sensibilities of boredom by uttering an Indian war-hoop. He was a free spirit..."



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But there could be a dark side to that free-spirit. It was evidenced at least once during Elbert's Larkin years. In 1890 greed overwhelmed him, and while J.D.L. was out-of-town, Elbert initiated an advertising campaign for "Six solid silver spoons given gratis to each reader...who orders a mammoth 'Sweet Home' box..." It turned out that the spoons were of inferior German silver, resulting in a backlash of consumer anger. J.D.L. and Darwin were appalled, with Darwin initiating strong measures to assuage customers.

In November, 1892, Elbert sold out his shares in the L.S.C. to J.D.L. in what appears to have been a contentiously negotiated and protracted arrangement. The original contract provided for transfer of stock in two real estate companies owned by J.D.L. plus three promissory notes payable on 1/1/1893, 7/1/1893 and 1/1/1894. Total value per Buffalo Historical Society records was \$26,000. Neither party contemplated the occurrence of the Great Depression of 1893 which was devastating to the L.S.C. J.D.L. was unable to make the payments, so Elbert sued him in July, 1893. They were able to reach a settlement, but only after J.D.L. began to investigate Bert's handling of the business accounts and sales of

stock to outsiders. Daniel Larkin, J.D.L.'s grandson, writes in his biography of J.D.L., that correspondence between J.D.L. and Bert "reveal Hubbard's willingness to distort the truth, to ignore the needs of others, and to relish the grand gesture when it served his purpose."

It was in the midst of all this chaos between the two men that J.D.L. learned that the reason Elbert left the company was not, as Elbert had claimed, to go to Harvard to get a degree and engage in writing and a contemplative lifestyle, but rather to pursue his passion for Alice Moore, with whom he had secretly cavorted going back to that fateful meeting at the East Aurora C.L.S.C. Elbert had, in fact, only audited class at Harvard. The attraction was that Alice had moved to Massachusetts to take a teaching job.

Alice had actually resided with Elbert and his unsuspecting wife, Bertha, for a time. The sense of betrayal, not only to his wife, but to the extended family - the Larkins, Wellers and Hubbards, was enormous.

*The correspondence between Elbert and Alice spanning their years of involvement, furnished by Elbert's son, Elbert II, to author Charles F. Hamilton and published in *As Bees in Honey Drown*, is very enlightening. Genius though Elbert may have been, he was a pathological narcissist. Awash in his absolute confidence in his intellect, creativity and spirituality, he clearly felt superior to the needs and lives of everyone else!*

His charisma was such that he could evoke sympathy and forgiveness from those he hurt the worst. Unwed Alice became pregnant, in December 1893, which was a scandalous situation, especially for a school teacher. She did not tell Elbert right away because he went on a protracted trip with a male friend to England and France. Receiving a letter from Alice informing him of the pregnancy, he continued his trip with a worried sense that he was now to be responsible for two families. On return he went back to East Aurora and Bertha and the boys. But he also took the opportunity to study medical journals about child birth. To keep the secrecy of Alice' pregnancy Elbert moved her to a cottage in a small town in Massachusetts. When he returned to her in September, 1894, Elbert, instead of seeking medical help, successfully delivered the ten-pound baby girl, Miriam! The next month he returned to East Aurora and his family there.



In the meantime, Alice' sister learned of the baby, confronted Elbert who was then forced to confess to Bertha. Elbert chose to stay with Bertha; Alice and baby moved back to W.N.Y. to live with her sister. Though they had promised their families to cease their relationship, soon they were again engaging in trysts. But not before wife, Bertha became pregnant! Katherine was born in January, 1896.

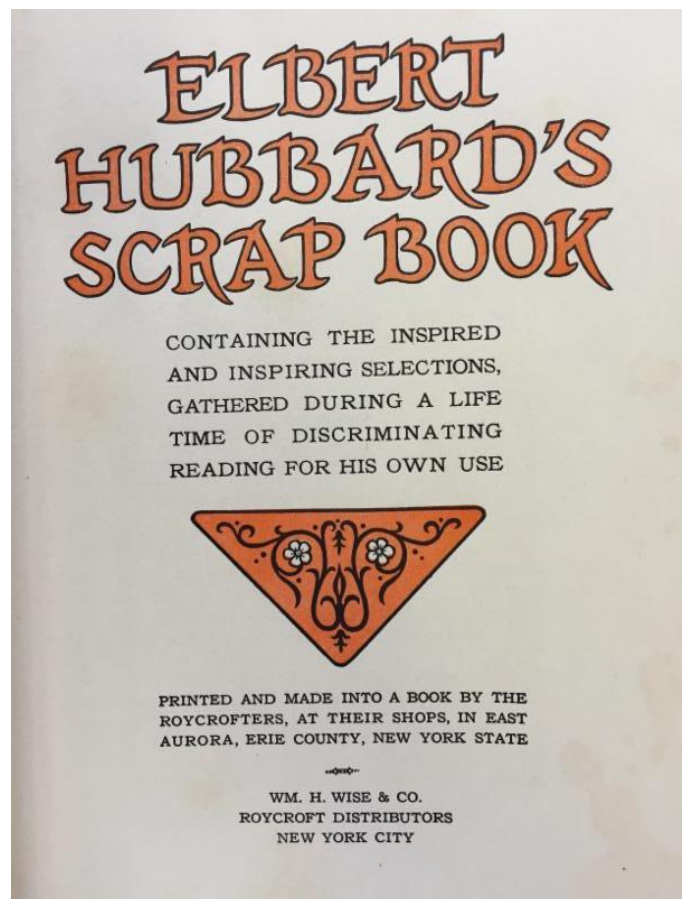
Eventually Elbert and Bertha divorced and on January 18, 1904 Alice and Elbert married.

Throughout all of this drama, Elbert was writing essays and fiction and went on lecture tours espousing his lofty ideas of enlightenment. However, when he found himself unable to find a publisher, he purchased a printing company to publish his own work. This led to, in 1897, building a

print shop in East Aurora and the publication of "The Philistine: A Magazine of Protest" and the Little Journeys series of essays leading to the development of the Roycroft Movement, a community of craftsmen soon were attracted to East Aurora. The Roycroft Inn, possibly inspired by the design of the Larkin Administration Building by Frank Lloyd Wright, was largely completed in 1905.

One of Elbert's essays, published by the Roycrofters, was based on the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. He had been quite impressed by the dignity of some of the wealthy people as they went to their deaths, particularly of Mr. and Mrs. Isador Strauss. They had brought blankets from their stateroom to throw down to the people in life boats. Mrs. Strauss refused to go into a life boat; insisting she would stay with her husband. She said to her husband as he urged her to get into a boat, according to Elbert, "All these years we have travelled together, and shall we part now? No, our fate is one." Elbert concluded in tribute to them, "You knew how to do three great things - you knew how to live, how to love and how to die." And he added, "But to pass out as did Mr. and Mrs. Isador Strauss is a privilege. Happy lovers, both. In life they were never separated, and in death they are not divided."

Three years later, Elbert audaciously determined that he was going to go to Germany to confront Kaiser Wilhelm about the need to end the war in Europe. Did he have an appointment to see him? It does not appear to be the case. But nevertheless somehow Elbert thought that the Kaiser would not only see him, but would listen to him. Despite warnings by the Kaiser that Germany would be torpedoing English ships and those of her allies, he and Alice booked on the Lusitania. They were driven to Buffalo to catch the train to NYC by their friend and biographer, Felix Shay, whose book was published in 1926. Shay notes that in four issues of *The Philistine*, (11/1896; 12/1896 and 1/1899), Elbert had written of death in the Irish Sea. Did he have a foreboding of his fate? He also quotes a survivor as saying that Elbert, when asked what he was going to do, simply shook his head. Alice was to have said, "There does not seem to be anything to do," and then walked arm in arm with Elbert back to their cabin. Charles Lauriat, another survivor, reported that "Mr. Hubbard stayed by the rail affectionately holding his arm around his wife's waist and both seemed unable to act." And thus this enigmatic man and his wife went to their deaths on May 7, 1915, rather as if Elbert had orchestrated this dramatic end of his life.



~From the Desk of Sharon Osgood