

MAUDE VAN LOON INTERVIEW

Interview by Howard Fredricks

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
UW-LA CROSSE  
1970

FREDRICKS: And they were her favorites?

MISS VAN LOON: They were her favorites and they certainly became my favorites too. We would cry and laugh together. When I finished reading the books I would begin over again.

FREDRICKS: Would this be read at night or during the day?

MISS VAN LOON: No when she combed my hair in the morning. She had a very, very soft heart. Her - one of her boys left home at one time and she didn't know - the folks didn't know where he was, and perhaps that made a difference in her attitude because while it was the day of tramps on the railroad track - you know they would go up and down the tracks and many of them would stop and she told me one time that she felt as though she were doing something for George when she did something for the tramps that came to the door. Later there was - there were two boys that came to the house and papa was haying, and needed help and so those two boys stayed and they really became part of the family. Well everybody did who worked in the - worked as hired men. They slept in our beds; mama mended for them, cooked for them, and they really became part of the family. After they had been there quite a while and after papa had paid them for their - the last part of their work, they left on a Saturday night; they went to town and never came back. That was the way the tramps did you know, there wasn't any ceremony about leaving. Then mama was always ready for the next person who came.

FREDRICKS: How old were you at this time?

MISS VAN LOON: Oh, perhaps fifteen.

FREDRICKS: So it was right around the 1900s early 1900s right?  
Did the boys eat with you - eat with the family?

MISS VAN LOON: Always.

FREDRICKS: And in the evening they would sit in the living room with the rest of the family?

MISS VAN LOON: I really can't think of anything about that arrangement at the house that one could say that they weren't part of the family - they were in the house and entered into the conversation.

FREDRICKS: Were your family unusual in that the tramps were welcomed? Or was this customary; were your neighbors also hospitable to the tramps?

MISS VAN LOON: I never heard that they were particularly like that, I couldn't say. But mama never turned anyone away and she always knew that they were ready for a good meal, and she always provided it too.

FREDRICKS: Was George ever heard from again?

MISS VAN LOON: Oh yes George came back after a little time and he was the one who died in Florida. He was working away from home in Iowa when he volunteered for the Army.

FREDRICKS: What had he done when he disappeared? Did he work in farms?

MISS VAN LOON: I can't tell you.

FREDRICKS: Do you remember the homecoming? Do you remember when he came back?

MISS VAN LOON: No.

FREDRICKS: What were your jobs around the house during these early years to help mother - in the kitchen? Or did you work in the fields?

MISS VAN LOON: Yes both. Outdoor work was part of everybody's program.

FREDRICKS: What about school?

MISS VAN LOON: I want to tell about my mother first. Her birthday was always looked forward to as much as Christmas. She always prepared a meal that I remember, and one thing that she always served was fried chicken and I thought that nobody could fry chicken like my mother did. Her birthday was in November, and often the weather was inclement, and we - I think every birthday she invited her brother - my uncle Henry LaFleur, and Annie to come down for dinner, if the weather looked bad they had to come with a horse and buggy, and sometimes we would wait and wait and they wouldn't appear and she would say "well I guess the folks are not coming from up country today." she would say to papa in a disappointed way. But we always celebrated the birthdays just as much as we did any holiday. More. She loved her Plymouth rock block. She cared for those chickens and sometimes she would take me with her to go out to shut up the chickens at night, and I wonder if you have ever seen those coops that we used to have for the mother and her little chickens. I almost wish that I had kept one of those coops.