

The Luther Trio Round the World 1927-1928

Everyone in Saratoga County knows about Luther Forest but few now remember Thomas (Tommy) Luther for who it was named. Tommy was born in Ballston Spa in 1862. As a young man, he worked for the Boston & Maine Railroad which had built a hotel on the southeast end of Saratoga Lake near where Stillwater and Malta meet. The railroad soon tired of the hotel business and sold it to Tommy who made it the place to be for the rich and famous. Lillian Russell, Diamond Jim Brady, Jack Dempsey, Jay Gould, Gene Tunney and Eleanor Roosevelt were only some of the many who came to the White Sulphur Spring Hotel for the famous fish dinners and to see and be seen. These celebrities spread Tommy's reputation throughout the country.

Over the years he became concerning about the land that over looked the Lake, much of which had been stripped of trees which were cut for telephone poles. In 1901 he purchased 65 acres and began practicing progressive forestry. He eventually purchased 7,000 acres and was planting over 1,000,000 trees a year in conjunction with the State Conservation Department and the Cornell School of Forestry. He once told a reporter "The poet was right when he said that only God can make a tree. But somehow I always feel that I am lending God a helping hand when I set out a tree." Everyone who lives or works in Luther Forest owes Tommy a vote of thanks.

Tommy was a man of many interests, not all of which could be satisfied on the shores of Saratoga Lake. On Thursday, November 10, 1927, Luther, his wife, Alice and daughter, Margaret, sailed from New York City harbor on a journey that would encompass over 38,000 miles and encircle the globe. They would not return to home until the following April. In the meantime they visited Havana, the Panama Canal, and the west coast of the United States, Honolulu, Japan, Shanghai, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Ceylon, the Suez Canal, the Holy Land, Sicily, Italy, Switzerland, Holland, London, and finally France. Not until April 3, 1928 did they arrived home in New York Harbor on the liner Olympia, having visited 18 countries and changed currencies on 15 occasions. While most of the miles were traveled on ocean steamships, they also used row boats, river boats, rickshaws, donkeys, camels, railroads, buses, sedan chairs and "ancient horse drawn carriages like you see in museums." They experienced violent storms at sea and stayed in some primitive hovels, as well as the best hotels in the world.

Through it all he keep a journal in which he described their experience. He titled it The Luther Trio around the World 1927-1928 and published it privately to be shared with friends and family. Tommy was a wonderful and insightful writer. He was a keen observes of local customs, economic conditions, class relationships and the local flora and fauna, particular the lumber. He often made comparisons to conditions back in America, particularly on Saratoga Lake. He employed humor, often at his own expense. For instance he described a bout of sea sickness as "dancing the Charlestown" and tells of appearing on deck during a hot spell in the Orient in his "B.V.D.'s and pajamas". The Luther ladies did not think this was particularly humorous.

As he traveled, he was often recognized as a celebrity. On the day they left New York “Someone spilled the beans and the newspapers sent photographers to snap us and interview.” On the way to Honolulu, they shared a table with the well-known actor Joseph Jefferson and had been greeted by the owner of the steamship line when they arrived in San Francisco. At a masquerade party aboard ship, a guess dressed as a news boy shouted “Extra – White Sulphur Springs gone dry.” In the midst of Prohibition, Tommy’s resort on Saratoga Lake was apparently known round the world as a good place for a drink. He felt that prohibition made America look foolish in the eyes of the world and strongly advocated for its repeal.

A full month was spent visiting the Biblical sights in the Holy Land and an additional week in Rome. Luther’s writings reveal his deep belief in the tenets of Christianity, but he also demonstrated a familiarity and appreciation for the traditions and culture of both the Moslem and Jewish faiths. In addition to following in the footsteps of Christ, as described in the New Testament, the Luther’s went to the Wailing Wall, Rachel’s Tomb and the Mosque of Omar.

Although on vacation, Tommy could never really forget his two business interest- hospitality and lumbering. He noted the cost of electricity and freight charges in each area he visited and often commented on the suitability (or lack of) of their lodging. He noted the types of wood products used in the local economies and visited saw mills and forest preserves which he compared to his own back in Saratoga County. He collected some cedar seeds from the Garden of Gethsemane with the intent of introducing them back home.

Tommy ended his book advising his friends “not to lay up treasures that they or others may lose but take a trip around the world on the Dollar Line Steamers with all the side trips possible that your time permits.”



Paul Perreault
Town of Malta Historian



The Lusher Trio.



The Luther Trio



The Luther Trio