



3-15-1991

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Recommended Citation

Whitney, Inez Schneider (1991) "A Brief Affair," *Westview*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 3 , Article 13.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol10/iss3/13>

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A Brief Affair

—By Inez Schneider Whitney

Serendipitous

PREFACE. My grandfather, Rudolph Emil Helmuth Schneider, was born in Berlin, Germany. When he was eighteen, his father, Edward Schneider, decided to bring his family to America. He had several boys; and since they were required to take military training, he was sure that sooner or later they would be involved in wars.

Edward settled in Nebraska. Rudolph married a few years later. He had three children. Edward, my father, was the oldest. In 1893, Rudolph and my father took part in the Run at the opening of the Cherokee Strip in Oklahoma Territory. After several years of hardship, they sold out and the family traveled by wagon to Custer County where they purchased school land.

My father married, and I was born on a farm near Custer one year before Oklahoma became a state. I never knew my grandmother since I was only three months old when she died, but how I adored my grandfather! Although the following incident happened when I was quite young, I still remember it. Perhaps it was impressed upon my mind since the tale was told over and over through the years at family gatherings.

THE INCIDENT. Papa's mother died in 1906 when I was three months old. My German grandfather was grief-stricken. He missed her companionship and her good cooking. Her daughter, my Aunt Gussie, was fifteen. She had been spoiled and waited on by Grandma; so due to no fault of her own, she was of little help.

A few years passed. One day Grandpa saw a notice under "Personals" in *CAPPER'S WEEKLY*. A widow of about Grandpa's age was interested in marriage. Her name was Mrs. Federal, and she lived in Kansas. The notice sparked Grandpa's interest. He wrote a letter, and soon there was a lively correspondence. They agreed that she would travel by train from Kansas City for a week's visit.

Although I was only four, I remember the air of excitement. We lived less than a mile away, and my Aunt Gussie and Grandpa were often at our home. Pootsie (the family's pet name for Grandpa) bought a new suit, a white shirt, and a red tie. He spent much time polishing his buggy and the horse's harness.

At last the day of Mrs. Federal's arrival came. Pootsie stopped by our house; we complimented him on his fine appearance. "I must go now," he said. "I want to be there when the train pulls in."

With a crack of the whip he was off and soon disappeared down the road in a cloud of dust. My parents had made plans for the two of them to stop for dinner—the noontime meal—on the way back. On the

farm it was dinner and supper—not lunch and dinner.

Papa decided to stay in from the field to help welcome the guest. He and Mama were hoping that the visit might blossom into a marriage. Such an alliance would relieve them of some of the responsibility they felt for Grandpa and Aunt Gussie. Everyone, including the hired hand, eagerly awaited the return of the happy couple.

"There comes Pa's buggy," Aunt Gussie said.

Into the yard they came. Grandpa pulled the buggy up short. His facial expression was grim. "Mrs. Federal, you can get out," he said abruptly. She looked surprised but stood up. Papa rushed over and grasped her hand to steady her as she stepped down.

"I'm Mr. Schneider's son," he said, and introduced her to the others. Then Mama took her into the house.

Papa went with Grandpa to the barn to help him unharness the horse. "Pa, where's your manners? Why didn't you help the lady out of the buggy?"

"Ach, Eddie, I will have nothing to do with her. She can stay at your house until time for her to go home."

"What do you mean? She came at your invitation. You couldn't wait for her to get here. Why have you changed your mind?"

"She looks like a scarecrow. How skinny she is. A puff of wind could blow her away."

"I wouldn't call her skinny. A very nice-looking lady, I'd say."

"Now, Eddie, you know we Germans like fat cows, fat pigs, and fat horses. And we like fat women, too. No beanpoles for us. I do not want her in my house. She might never leave."

The week passed slowly. Grandpa would have nothing to do with Mrs. Federal. It was up to Mama and Papa to keep her entertained and to show her around the countryside.

The day she was to leave, Grandpa was not to be found anywhere. Mama bade her goodbye, and Papa took her to Custer to the train.

That afternoon, Grandpa and Aunt Gussie came down for supper. We were out in the yard. Aunt Gussie pulled me over to one side and whispered, "Go say to Pootsie, 'Do you love Mrs. Federal?'"

Like any four-year-old, I obeyed. Trotting over to Grandpa, I asked, "Pootsie, do you love Mrs. Federal?"

He threw up his hands. With a pained look, he said, "Ach, honey! How can you say such a thing?"

He never looked at any woman again. His experience with Mrs. Federal definitely ended his quest for romance.

*(INEZ SCHNEIDER WHITNEY of Arlington, Virginia, is no rookie in WESTVIEW circles. She has made many meaningful contributions to our publishing ventures.) **

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