

**FAMILY NARRATIVE**  
**The Wissler and Polk Families**  
**(Mary Graham, August 2012)**

**This is a narrative of the Wissler-Polk family history insofar as we know it. The narrative began to take shape when mom and I went through old photos, records, bibles and files in her apartment after dad died. We spent a pleasant year around the table in the living room, enjoying the lake view, puzzling over old photos, writing down mom's memories and dad's, trying to fit faces with names. We were lucky that the family had preserved so many photos and documents from the 1800s and early 1900s. Mom's memories have made this story possible. Thanks mom! Barbie has added and corrected. And Liz Silva has done an in-depth organization of the archive while digitizing photos and documents and added to this narrative as well.**

**I hope that this story will give children and grandchildren a sense of the traditions that form part of their roots, and the interesting characters that came before them. It has been a family of good luck, exceptionally educated and strong women, hard-working men and resilience from early deaths and financial troubles, along with some tragedy. We come from a family of farmers, a blacksmith, musicians, business entrepreneurs – as we would call them today, good cooks (!), and many, many teachers. What strikes me especially is how the families valued education – and how the families responded to adversity. After early deaths – usually due to disease – or financial misfortune, family helped family recover. The Shute sisters moved in together and all found professional jobs. The Polks were given a house by Auntie Ice after Oakley's clothing store went bankrupt during the Depression. Of course, these were the days before governments provided for those in need. But I'm glad that the Wissler and Polk families had those values. It is part of our good luck of being part of their future generations.**

**BETTY WISSELER'S FAMILY**

Betty Wissler's mother was Hilda Shute, the middle of three college-educated and accomplished sisters who grew up in Richmond, Indiana in the 1880s and 1890s. Hilda was the daughter of Eleonora Lupton Shute and John Howard Shute, called Howard. The Shutes, birthright Quakers, came to Richmond from England several generations earlier. Howard and Eleonora met at Quaker meeting and married in 1886. They moved from Richmond to Aurora, Illinois on the Fox River when Howard became executive secretary to the first head of a railroad in Chicago. That job provided a comfortable living for the family. Howard commuted into Chicago by electric railway. This might have been in the 1870s. Eleonora, who was a school teacher, gave birth to three daughters, Florence, Hilda, and Eleonora. Hilda was born in 1887. Howard died suddenly of early diabetes when the children were very young.

After her husband's death, Eleonora Shute moved back to Richmond with her young daughters to live with her two sisters, Jean and Anna Lupton. They moved into a large brick house at 208 N. 14<sup>th</sup> Street. The Lupton sisters' father and a son had died in the civil war – not of war wounds but of cholera. At that time little was known of the causes or treatment of cholera and, of course, antibiotics would not be discovered for another 50 years. The father and son had just finished the construction of the house, which still stands, just before they went off to war. The Lupton sisters all dressed in the simple style of Quaker women of the time and never cut their hair, as was the custom. Hilda had striking curly red hair.

All three Lupton sisters became professional women. Aunt Jean Lupton, who never married, was the first woman to be a legal secretary in Richmond. Jean earned a good salary which helped to support the three Shute girls and their mother. Anna was a first grade teacher in Richmond.

Betty remembers that when she was growing up in New Castle, the Polk family still drove to Richmond to visit the Luptons on Sunday afternoons, a 30-mile drive. Betty remembers the lilies of the valley and the violets in the grass of the house's big yard. Barbara also remembers Aunt Jean and her violet-filled yard when Jean was in her early 40s. On those visits, Anna Lupton, a first grade teacher, would draw beautiful

**pictures of birds for Betty and her sister Mary. Anna also had an interesting breakfast routine. She would pour boiling water over shredded wheat and then add sugar and milk. Betty remembers that Hilda had a Ouija Board and would bring it out to ask life's big questions with her sisters. Florence, Hilda, and Eleonora attended schools in Richmond and all graduated from Earlham College.**

**Florence Shute, the oldest of the three and a petite woman with great energy, was a talented musician. She sang and played the piano, studied music at Earlham, and lived most of her life in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where she was head of the music department of the city's largest high school. She particularly enjoyed that teaching job, Betty remembers, because many students were first generation Europeans and Asians, new to the United States and eager to learn. She tried to go to Europe every summer for special tutoring in orchestral and choral conducting. Florence was also actively involved in peace movements throughout her adult life. She collaborated with a Catholic priest in Pittsburgh who was a leader of the movement there. Florence took a special interest in Betty and Bob's children when they were young and joined the family on at least one trip to Switzerland.**

**Eleonora, the youngest Shute sister, married Fred Hallowell, a New York Times foreign reporter who was assigned to Rome for some time after they were married. Eleonora was a small town girl who did not enjoy world travel. The marriage ended in a mutually-agreed divorce. Eleonora then managed bookstores in New York City.**

**Hilda Shute graduated from Earlham College, majoring in German and music. Hilda enjoyed learning languages and taught Latin, German, and French after graduating from college.**

**After college, Hilda's first job was teaching high school in Russiaville, a small community in Indiana -- really just a wide place in the road, Betty remembers. It was not an easy assignment. Many of her students were older than she and they sometimes gave her a hard time. They made fun of her red hair and tried to scare her. She remembered boys peeking in her window at night. Although still young, she was then appointed head of the modern language department in Kokomo, Indiana's high school. Mary Polk remembers that Hilda most**

wanted to teach German but most schools had given up teaching German during World War I when anti-German sentiments grew extreme.

Hilda married Oakley M. Polk in the Quaker church in Richmond in 1915. Mary Polk remembers that the church was later turned into a museum and Oakley used to tease Hilda about her church becoming a museum. Hilda and Oakley met at a sugaring down, invited by friends.

Oakley Polk (1885-1959) had grown up in Lincoln, Nebraska, where the Polk family had settled. Many were lawyers or judges. His parents owned the local newspaper in Lincoln. His father was Milton Polk. His mother was Catherine (Kitty Lou) Alsbaugh. Oakley had one younger sister, Emma Polk, who married Henry Chesick. His mother and father divorced after his father had an affair with a woman who lived next door and she became pregnant.

Oakley was 17 when his parents divorced. He and his mother and sister moved to New Castle. Oakley finished high school in New Castle and worked after school in a friend's clothing store selling overalls and "Sunday suits" to local farmers. Most farmers had only one Sunday suit so those purchases were not frequent but the store was prosperous in the 1920s. Slowly, Oakley bought into this store and became half-owner. At one point, things were going so well that he invested in some Florida real estate. That land turned out to be not as advertised and he lost money – an unusual episode since he was not a speculator.

Elizabeth Anne Polk (later Betty Wissler), called Liz Anne, was born on November 11, 1917. Mary Patricia Polk was born in 1921.

In New Castle, the Polks first rented a house on South Main Street with a big backyard that had a cherry tree, a peach tree, and two pear trees. Mary Polk may have been born there. The house had two bedrooms and a coal furnace. Mary and Betty shared an enormous bed. "To cut down on arguments," Betty remembers, "we used a pencil and drew down the middle of the bed. Then we still argued endlessly about whether someone had stuck an elbow over the line. There was no direct heat to the second floor so we ran downstairs with our clothes in the morning to get dressed on the first floor."

**The Polks moved to the South 11<sup>th</sup> St. house where Mary Polk lived until her death in 2011. Mary remembers that it was initially owned by Auntie Ice who loaned it to the young family without charging rent. Auntie Ice lived next door in a big house. Her husband was a farmer who had bought land that was very good and had made a lot of money. They managed quite well. Auntie Ice was the sister of Oakley's mother, Catherine Louise Alsbaugh, and was married to Willard Ice. Auntie Ice had had one daughter who died at age nine of meningitis. Family helping family in that way was considered the normal thing, Betty remembers. After she was married, Hilda taught German at the New Castle high school.**

**When the United States joined World War I in 1917 Oakley, like other young men, was likely to be drafted, but he was allowed to remain home because he had a new baby - Betty.**

**Continuing to work at the clothing store, Oakley would drive to the Chicago headquarters of Hart Schaffner Marx in the family car and bring back Sunday suits that had been ordered. When Betty was 10 or 11 years old, Oakley took her with him on one of the Chicago trips. Betty recalls how the manufacturing company looked. It was a Jewish organization so everyone assumed that Oakley was Jewish too -- an old factory. One room was for visiting salesmen. The trip took most of the day. Once in Chicago, Betty and her father stayed at what is now the Hilton Hotel downtown.**

**Oakley's younger sister Emma also lived in New Castle. Emma always worked with her husband Henry Chesick in his printing store and shop where there were big printing machines in the basement. Henry came from a Czech family that had settled in Madison, Wisconsin. He was the first in his family to go to college. The Chesicks had two children -- John and Catherine. John became a professor of chemistry at Haverford College, a Quaker college in Pennsylvania. Barbara remembers that Catherine was exceptionally beautiful and was married in a lavish backyard ceremony at her parents' home after an earlier fiancé was killed in World War II. Catherine did not have children, perhaps because she had epilepsy -- then thought to be inherited. She**

and her husband developed alcohol problems but she recovered and had a good life when older, Barbara remembers.

Betty and Mary went to elementary school and high school in New Castle. Betty remembers: "We walked to school about six blocks away. Everyone walked, except people who came in from the farms who got to ride a bus. I was always a little unhappy because living that close we were not allowed to eat at school and had to walk back and forth at lunch time. My mother always cooked a lunch. She made sautéed eggplant with crumbs at least once a week. Other lunches were scrambled eggs, grilled cheese sandwiches, sometimes accompanied by homemade tomato soup."

"I liked school. I liked some teachers better than others. I remember a 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher – the only male teacher I remember in the lower grades – who would become unconscious suddenly. He would look at the class with a blank stare for five minutes and then begin again to teach, not realizing what had happened. We never knew who knew about these episodes. At first the children giggled but that stopped because we liked him."

Mary and Betty worked in their father's men's clothing store as soon as they were tall enough to see over the counter. "I remember putting my chin on the display case where all the ties were. My first job was selling ties -- as soon as I could see above the case. I don't remember ever being paid – it was just what we did. It was fun. It was exciting. Saturday was a big day because the farmers would come into town and buy their overalls and the food they would need for a whole week. New Castle was very much a farm town then. Only Chrysler had an assembly plant."

That clothing store failed during the Depression. Oakley Polk owned the store with Morris Goodwin. When the store closed, Betty was about 14 and suddenly felt very responsible for the family. She went out and found jobs. She washed dishes in the local restaurant. She typed for Uncle Chesick. She and Mary operated a popcorn stand at the only local movie theater and sold peanuts that they toasted in their oven at home to be just the right brown color.

**Both Hilda's and Oakley's families were birthright Quakers but in New Castle there was no Quaker silent meeting of the sort that Hilda liked. The Quaker meeting had music and preachers. The family joined the Presbyterian church, which had a young peoples' program that the children in town wanted to be part of.**

**In high school Betty remembers some teachers who influenced her. "There were three siblings who were teachers. They were farmers who got up early and did the milking and then came to school. One man taught physics – I loved the subject probably because I loved him. One taught math. The third taught Latin. I think it was the teachers who hooked me on learning."**

**Hilda stayed home when Betty and Mary were young. Later, during the Depression, she started substituting as a high school German teacher when Oakley's store closed. Betty remembers that Hilda was paid only in scrip because the school board had no money to spend. "I worried about the whole family during those years."**

**Betty graduated from high school in 1935 in the depths of the Depression. "My father had insisted that whatever else I did in school that I learn to type. He paid me to type his business letters."**

**Betty entered Earlham College the following fall. "I always assumed I would go to college -- maybe because my mother assumed that both Mary and I would go to college. I think the only question was where we would go. That soon became evident. Earlham offered both of us full scholarships and it was close enough to home so that transportation was not a big issue."**

**The Depression was hard on the Polk family. It hit pretty suddenly. Farmers who were Oakley's customers at the clothing store could not pay their bills and the places Oakley had bought clothing from refused to honor his credit. The store stayed open a little while but pretty soon there were no customers. Either Oakley didn't have what they needed or they didn't have the money to buy what they needed, Betty**

remembers. People just patched their blue jeans. Betty remembers worrying about the family. They couldn't pay for groceries for more than a year. The grocer just did the best he could to get food that people had to have. A farmer who usually came by our house with eggs and butter and milk and scurried away "because he knew we couldn't pay but he wanted us to have what he knew we needed. Everyone sort of took care of everyone else."

After the clothing store closed, Oakley applied for a job with the Federal Housing Administration, a new agency created to help people find affordable housing. His job was assessing applications for newly available mortgages to make it possible for people to buy their own homes. He was given a job assessing those applications for a three- or four-state area. That meant that he traveled a lot. Sometimes the travel was farther than surrounding states. Once, the whole family drove with him to Oregon, Washington, and California. They drove in an old Cadillac. Betty remembers that she saw black cherries for the first time in Oregon. This was about 1933 or 1934. They stayed at travelers' inns, much like later bed and breakfasts.

The FHA job provided Oakley an opportunity to learn about real estate and provided a step toward starting his own real estate business in New Castle. Oakley Polk Real Estate was formed on the unusual idea of always telling people the negatives about the property that was for sale as well as the positives, Betty remembers. Mary Polk worked with her father and picked up the idea and expanded it, sometimes loaning people the money they needed for their down payments. The Polks knew everyone in the town and all about their families.

During high school summers, Betty waited on tables and organized activities at a Presbyterian summer camp on one of the northern lakes in Indiana. Perhaps 10 cabins with 10 campers each formed the camp which also had beautiful woods. Betty remembers the night when a skunk wandered into their cabin and hid under a bed. Pondering what to do, the campers simply opened the door wide to provide the visitor an easy exit and got back into bed.

During college summers Betty worked at a summer camp for girls outside Philadelphia. There she developed her own program in canoeing



and archery. She remembers that it was the only place she ever saw a hummingbird's nest with eggs in it.

Betty and Bob graduated from Earlham in 1939. Both had full tuition scholarships for graduate work at the University of Chicago, Bob to the medical school and Betty to the school of social work. Most of their friends had not gone on to college. They found work to support their parents during the continuing Depression. Hilda and Oakley Polk knew Chicago because of Oakley's frequent trips there.

Betty entered the School of Social Service Administration founded in 1908 by Sophonisba Breckinridge. Ms. Breckinridge, the first woman to be admitted to the bar in Kentucky but barred from practicing law because she was a woman, came to the University of Chicago to get a Ph.D. in political science.

Ms. Breckinridge was a senior faculty member when Betty entered the school in the fall of 1939 and she was the house mother of Green Hall where Betty lived. Betty remembers her as austere, a firm believer in women's rights and ahead of herself by a generation or two. Meanwhile, Bob moved into a medical fraternity house on campus.

Bob and Betty were married quietly on April 7, 1940 at the Thorndike-Hilton chapel on 58<sup>th</sup> street and University Avenue with four students who were friends attending. At that time it was the general assumption that graduate student women would not get married while in school or working. Bob and Betty moved into a very small third floor walk-up apartment at 6136 Woodlawn adorned with bed bugs, Betty remembers. "Our nearest grocery was a block and a half away." Betty remembers buying their best roast pork for 15 cents a pound and learning to cook "by chance." Betty continued her studies in the fall of 1940 after Barbie was born in November, taking Barbie to class while she was sleeping. Ms. Breckinridge liked Bob although she didn't expect to like husbands. She was the first one to give Barbie an ice cream cone.

Betty realized she couldn't complete her Master's degree while raising Barbie and Mary, born in 1944, and working to help support the family while Bob was still in school. Bob and Betty house-sat one summer for some Earlham friends. They then moved to 5610 Blackstone, a coach-

house/garage apartment. Because of fuel rationing during war time, there was never enough heat for 24 hours. Betty remembers how cold it was for Barbie crawling on the floor. The Wisslers then moved to 5744 Drexel, a married-student housing apartment, where Mary was born in 1944 and David in 1947. Betty remembers staying in the hospital the required 2 weeks when Mary was born, including a full week of bed-rest. Betty remembers when their pet hamster, placed in the bathtub with the plug in, took out the plug and dropped her babies down the drain. That apartment was half a block from the hospital where Bob was still in school. Betty worked for the Red Cross during the war and for Chicago Child Care (58<sup>th</sup> and Drexel) for many years doing foster-home and adoption placements.

The Wisslers moved again to 5715 Drexel, a first floor apartment across the street, with two bedrooms. Barbie and Mary shared a bedroom. John was born while they lived in that apartment, in 1949. In a rare trip away, Bob and Betty took a week off and went to Oklahoma to visit friends.

After Betty and Bob Wissler were married, Oakley would often come to Chicago and take them and their children to the Tropical Hut restaurant on 57<sup>th</sup> and Kenwood for a treat. The Tropical Hut had great butterscotch sundaes. It was decorated in a South Sea Islands theme and served steak and lobster tails.

Mary and Barbie remember Betty canning peaches and tomatoes in the summer in the apartment kitchen. Since the family had no car, Bob and colleague Marc Beem would take the street car to a farmers market at 71<sup>st</sup> and Cottage Grove. They brought back the ripest peaches and tomatoes. Betty and Louise Beem would then boil the peaches and tomatoes and fill mason jars. Placed in David Wissler's red wagon, Bob and Marc took the jars to the hospital at night to process in the autoclave.

Mary remembers cooling off in a wash tub on the apartment's wooden back landing on hot days. "The alley, the climbing trees in neighbors' yards and the alcoves between buildings were full of adventure for me and my friends. We had the run of the block at ages 6 and 7. We made mysterious potions out of berries that we found on shrubs and bottled

them, tried to turn coal into diamonds by burying it (we heard that would work), and starting digging a tunnel to China between two buildings. I hunted four-leaf clovers and made clover chains (and ate quite a lot of clover and grass) with my best friend Barbie Probst and tried to enlarge my butterfly collection by trading for a luna moth (I never got one).”

Living at 5715, the family had a white cat, George Snowball. A shocking day was when George was hit by a car in the alley. Betty also remembers a horse-drawn Wanzer milk wagon delivering milk to the back door and a knife sharpener who came around in the alley.

Barbie and Mary walked to Ray School at 57<sup>th</sup> and Kimbark in a group of neighborhood children and walked home at lunch and back again in the afternoon. Betty remembers that Mrs. Adams was the very good first grade teacher. Before Ray School, Barbie, Mary, David and John went to a nursery school on Woodlawn near 58th.

Betty remembers that while ice skating under the Stagg Field stands with David and John a group of boys grabbed her arm. She fell on her hip and may have broken off a bit of bone that some years later led to the first of several hip replacements. Because no one in Chicago did hip replacements then Betty went to Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston for surgery.

## **POLK CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**Joseph Abijah Lupton**, father of Jean, Eleonora and Anna Lupton, died of cholera in Civil War, as did his 14 year-old son Samuel (1852-1866).

**Elizabeth Votaw Hampton Lupton**, mother of Jean, Eleonora and Anna Lupton, married Joseph in 1848.

**Jean R. Lupton**, sister to Eleonora Lupton Shute (Betty’s grandmother), never married and was the first female legal secretary in Richmond, IN.

**Elizabeth "Lizzie" Lupton, sister to Eleonora Lupton Shute (Betty's grandmother), married Will Bradbury and had two children, Clifford and Anna May.**

**Eleonora Lupton married Howard Shute, who died in his 30's of diabetes. The Shutes had three daughters, Florence, Hilda (Betty's mother) and Eleanor.**

**Howard Shute, husband of Eleonora Lupton.**

**Florence Shute remained single and spent her adult life in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she was head of the music department of the city's largest high school.**

**Eleanor Shute managed bookstores in New York City after her amicable divorce from Fred Hallowell, a New York Times foreign reporter.**

**Hilda Shute Polk, (b.1887) married Oakley Polk in 1913 and had two daughters, Elizabeth Anne (1917- ) [Betty] and Mary Patricia (1921-2011).**

**Oakley Polk, son of Milton and Catherine (Kitty Lou) Alsbaugh Polk. Kitty Lou's aunt, married to Willard Ice, was known as "Auntie Ice".**

## **BOB WISSLER'S FAMILY**

### **Peter Wissler and his family**

**The first Wissler that we can identify as a relative is Jacob Wissler, William O. Wissler's great-great grandfather and therefore Bob Wissler's great-great-great grandfather. Jacob may have been the son of an Ulrich Wissler who came to America from Germany in 1733. However, B.F. Wissler, William O. Wissler's cousin, researched family history carefully and reports that there were two Ulrich Wisslers who came to America at about that time. He adds that eight or nine Wissler families came to America between 1733 and 1765. B.F. Wissler and**

**Muriel Wissler, Bob Wissler's mother, who also carefully researched family history, could not figure out which of Jacob's sons was the father of Peter Wissler, therefore which man was William O. Wissler's grandfather. We know that Jacob had 12 children, the oldest born in 1770 and the youngest in 1787.**

**Peter Wissler was born in 1813, a grandson of Jacob Wissler and also one of 12 children. The Wisslers were "plain people," Pennsylvania Dutch and originally from Switzerland, according to Eleanor Wissler Lindley's notes. He married Catherine Brown when he was 22 and she was 19 and they traveled from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania to Wayne County, Indiana by covered wagon around 1842. Peter and Catherine had nine children. A twin girl, whose brother Simon survived, died in infancy. Two other children, Rudolph and Mary Ann, died at ages three and five, probably of diphtheria. Peter himself died of typhoid fever at age 45 in 1859 while visiting Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.**

**One of Peter's children was John Martin Wissler, who in turn was the father of B.F. Wissler (1848-1942), who was the father of Clark Wissler. B.F. Wissler took great pains to assemble a family history insofar as he could. It was his notes that Muriel Thomas Wissler, Bob Wissler's mother, drew on for her own account of the Wissler family.**

**Clark Wissler, who was born in 1870 and died in 1947, was a pioneer in the field of anthropology. Born near Hagerstown, Indiana, he graduated from Indiana University in 1897 and completed his doctorate in psychology at Columbia University in 1901. He then developed an interest in the new field of anthropology and succeeded Franz Boas as Curator of Ethnography at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. His own work focused on Plains Indian tribes and he collected many artifacts. His archives are at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana.**

**Peter and Catherine's second child and first son was Daniel B. Wissler, born in 1841, father of William O. Wissler, Bob Wissler's father. Daniel married Matilda Wagner. Matilda was the ninth of 13 children of David Wagner and Lydia Hauck Wagner. Daniel and Matilda had three children, Catherine, David Peter, and William Oscar. Matilda died in 1874 when William, the youngest child, was only about**

six weeks old. The two older children went to live with their grandmother Catherine Brown Wissler but baby Will was taken in by Daniel's sister Lydia Wissler Bower who, with her husband Francis (Frank) Bower, raised him on their farm near Hagerstown on Lost Mile Road.

Matilda's father was David Wagner. In 1939, when he was principal of Hibberd School, William O. Wissler made a translated copy of his mother's family bible, printed in German in 1829. "David Wagner married Lydia Hauck in 1825 in Losler township, Union County." The bible records the birth of Sarianna in 1826, Andreas in 1828, Michael in 1830, Elizabeth in 1832, Maria in 1834, Margaret in 1836, David in 1838, Lydia in 1840 and Matilda in 1842. A last son, Jacob, was born in 1845.

William O. Wissler (1874 - 1948), called Will by friends and family, was a son of Daniel Wissler and the father of Bob and Eleanor Wissler. He was born on a farm near Hagerstown. Lydia Wissler Bower, his aunt, and Francis (Frank) Bower, raised him in their home after his mother died. They had no children of their own. Will started school in a one-room school house in Jefferson township. Frank Bower was a country blacksmith and Will often said he was raised in a blacksmith's shop. Muriel, Bob's mother and W.O. Wissler's wife, reports that Frank Bower was "a fine old man, kindly and shrewd and something of a philosopher. Lydia and Frank were industrious, frugal and resourceful and possessed many secrets of the Pennsylvania Dutch manners, customs, and know-how."

On August 28, 1902 William married Bertha Muriel Thomas, called Muriel. The Thomases were Quakers whose origins were English, according to Eleanor's notes. Muriel was raised on a farm in Howard County, Indiana near Hemlock and Kokomo. Muriel and Will met one summer while preparing for their first teaching jobs in a one room schoolhouse, Terre Haute Normal School. Both had graduated from high school and attended the Normal school for one summer term and passed the teachers' exam. Eleanor recalls Aunt Lydia, Uncle Abe, and Aunt Ettie. She notes that her maternal grandmother Lydia Ellen Payne Thomas, called Ellen or Ella (1851-1936) was still teaching

**Sunday school when she was 84 years old. Ella Payne's ancestry included Thomas Paine who wrote "Common Sense" and many other pamphlets during the Revolutionary War.**

**The Wisslers lived at first in Cambridge City, Indiana where Will taught in the high school. When they moved to Richmond the board of trustees of the Richmond schools assigned him to teach at Garfield Junior High School in 1906 at a salary of \$800 a year. He was then appointed principal of Finley School, and later principal of a high school in Madison, Indiana. He was a high school teacher at Morton High School on South 17<sup>th</sup> Street in Richmond for 10 years, and was superintendent in Hagerstown from 1920 to 1926. Finally, Will taught at Test Junior High School in Richmond and then served as principal of Hibberd Junior High school until 1944, when he retired. Eleanor Wissler writes that "his kindly influence was felt in the lives of many young people."**

**Their daughter Eleanor (1908-1997) was born while the family was living in Richmond. Eleanor remembers enjoying horse and carriage rides through the beautiful countryside of southern Indiana and along the Ohio River when the family lived in Madison. The family did not own a horse and carriage but rented one for these rides. While still too young to go to school, Eleanor remembers holding "classes" on the family's front steps where "Bob and Bill and the Hart twins were taught quite frequently. The big yard was headquarters for the neighborhood children. Flowers, trees and shrubs were planted and grew so that the yard was beautiful. A large vegetable garden reflected the farm background of the family. Birds were encouraged to feed and nest in the yard."**

**The Wisslers' son Bob was born in 1917 when Eleanor was almost nine. "He was a living doll," she reports, "and a great joy for everyone, particularly for his big sister." Eleanor remembered the pleasure of playing "mother."**

**When Eleanor was 11 and Bob was 2 the family moved to the farm on Lost Mile Road near Hagerstown. Frank Bower, who had raised Will, had died, and Lydia needed help doing the farming.**

**Eleanor recalls that the farm house was “unmodern in the broadest sense of the word: baseburner, wood cook stove, coal oil and gasoline lamps and the water pump on the porch replaced the modern conveniences of a city home.” Eleanor’s school for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade was a two-room country school. She was taken to school each day in a horse-drawn hack driven by old Mr. Solomon. Eleanor remembered the joys and sorrows of the Friday spelling match, the country final exam in Geography and physiology, and the box social, the highlight of the year.**

**Will took a job as a factory worker at first to support the family. The following fall he was appointed Superintendent of the Hagerstown and Jefferson Township Public Schools where a new high school had just been built.**

**Eleanor and Bob both remember farm life fondly. Eleanor writes that “the country life was filled with joys and sorrows but an interest in birds, animals (both wild and domestic) flowers and gardens influenced the future of the entire family. Grandma Bower kept the family supplied with homemade bread and pie, smear-case (similar to cottage cheese) and skillet cheese, fresh milk and cream, and fresh churned butter from the Jersey cows. There was a supply of maple syrup from the sugar camp in the woods. Fruit trees and strawberries along with fresh vegetables from the garden added to the plus side of country living. The Model T ford replaced Old Billy the horse as a means of transportation and moved into Grandpa’s blacksmith shop. The Model T was considered “the ultimate in transportation. Who could wish for more?” Butchering days on the farm brought many family treats – hams, bacon and shoulders for the smokehouse, fresh pork to be eaten, beef to be dried and canned and enjoyed.” Big iron kettles hung over a huge fire and the hogs became backbone and ribs, back strap and tenderloin, head cheese and souse. There were sausages and ham and shoulders waiting to be taken to the mysterious smoke house where they would hang until they were cured. “How good was the ham and gravy with Grandmother’s homemade bread.” Eleanor remembered the sweetness of the sugar pear, the succulence of the Bartlett, and the rich flavor of the greengage plum, the joyous experience of the strawberry**



patch, and the beauty of the row of oak leaf lettuces that lined the garden path.

The table featured skillet cheese or smear-case and maple syrup, pies filled with fruit or perhaps squash, pumpkin or old-fashioned cream, hickory nut cake.

Eleanor remembered that Bob had many cats, and took care of calves and baby pigs and chickens, Old Billy the horse, the buggy and the sleigh. He loved the bluebirds that nested in the fence posts along the lane that led to the woods where wild flowers bloomed in the spring, the frogs that sang in the pond, and the maple sugar camp.

The family moved back to Hagerstown at the beginning of Eleanor's senior year in high school when Will became superintendent of schools. Bob walked to second grade that year.

Eleanor attended Earlham College (across National Road 40 from the Wissler home) to prepare herself to be an English and Social Studies teacher, living at home to save money. When Eleanor graduated from Earlham she married Aaron Lindley, then principal and coach of Everton School in Fayette County, Indiana, and took a teaching job at the school. The next year a tornado destroyed their school, car, and the roof of their house. The Lindleys had a son, William Thomas Lindley, born in 1936. Aaron moved on to become superintendent of schools in Fort Wayne, Indiana and later joined the education department at Purdue University in Lafayette. Both Betty Wissler's mother Hilda and Eleanor Lindley became members of PEO, a secret organization of women dedicated to helping women get through college.

William Wissler also researched local history and was active in the Richmond community. He wrote a series of articles on the mills of Wayne country for the Palladium-Item, Richmond's newspaper. He was a member of the Masonic lodge at Cambridge City and the Knights of Pythias in Hagerstown. He was an elder of the First Presbyterian church and a member of the local Lions and City Farmers clubs.

William died of a sudden heart attack at age 74 in 1948. His obituary in the Richmond Indiana Palladium-Item on March 8, 1948

reported his death and burial in the Earlham cemetery. An editorial that accompanied the obituary talked about his service to the community as an educator and added that “he had a warm heart and a generous understanding of human nature.”

That issue of the newspaper also provides a glimpse of everyday life in Richmond in the late 1940s. On the first page it carried a story about a man who was burned by an exploding kerosene stove and an article with picture reporting on two 11<sup>th</sup> grade girls who had lost a bet that Richmond’s Red Devils basketball team would win and therefore had to push 2 pecans 2 blocks down the sidewalk with their noses. They appeared at school the next day with “slightly skinned noses.” Another front page story described President Truman’s problems with Democratic leaders because he had called for an anti-lynching and anti-discrimination law. The New Hampshire primary was approaching but southern Democrats were saying that they might not support President Truman.

Betty Wissler recalls that the Ku Klux Klan was active in both Richmond and New Castle during the years she and Bob were growing up. Richmond had a substantial African-American population because it was a terminus of the Underground Railroad. In New Castle, Betty remembers that there was one African-American girl in her high school class and perhaps no foreign-born children. The group that was really scorned was “the Kentuckians.” They were dressed poorly, had shabby shoes, were considered dirty and smelly and were the lowest income residents of New Castle. There was more of an effort to help blacks. New Castle was a manufacturing town when Betty was growing up, home to a Chrysler plant and to other small manufacturing businesses.

## **WISSLER CAST OF CHARACTERS**

Ulrich Wissler, came to America 1733. B.F. Wissler reports that there were two Ulrich Wisslers and that eight or nine Wissler families came to America about that time.

Jacob Wissler, William O. Wissler’s great-great grandfather and B.F. Wissler’s great-grandfather was father to 12 children.

**Peter Wissler (1786 -    ), a son of Jacob Wissler, came to Indiana in 1822?**

**Peter Wissler (1813 – 1859), a grandson of Jacob Wissler and grandfather of William O. Wissler. He and wife Catherine came to Wayne County probably about 1842. They had nine children, including Daniel, Maryann, Rudolph, Lydia and Simon Wissler. Three more children whose names are unknown but including a twin died when children, two probably of diphtheria. They then [farmed in Henry county, Liberty Township until Peter’s sudden death.] Peter died of typhoid fever at age 45 while visiting Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. After Peter died, the horses, hogs, cattle, sheep, oats, plows, harrows, wagons and other farming implements and household goods were sold at a public sale. The sale offered “three months credit on grain and 12 months on all other sums over three dollars.”**

**Abraham Wissler (brother of Peter Wissler). Pharis Wissler, his son, was living in Lancaster County (two miles south of Landisville) with his daughter Mrs. Harry Holbein when Muriel and William O. Wissler visited there in the late 1930s/early 1940s in search of Peter’s gravestone.**

**Catherine Brown Wissler (b.1816) was married to Peter Wissler, and was the mother of Lydia Wissler Bower and Daniel Wissler, Bob’s grandfather.**

**Lydia Wissler Bower (1843 -    ) daughter of Peter and Catherine Brown Wissler, married Francis Bower, a blacksmith. She and her husband raised her nephew, William O. Wissler (Bob’s father) when his mother died.**

**Francis (Frank) Bower, married Lydia Wissler. Frank was a blacksmith and member of the Church of the Brethren. Muriel reports he was “a fine old man, kindly, and shrewd and something of a philosopher. They were industrious frugal and resourceful and possessed many secrets of the Pennsylvania Dutch manners, customs, and know-how.”**

**Daniel B. Wissler (1841 - )** was a son of Peter Wissler, father of William O. Wissler and Bob's grandfather. He married Matilda Wagner. Their three children were Lydia Catherine, David Peter, and William Oscar.

**Matilda Wagner Wissler (1842 - 1874)**, mother of William O. Wissler and wife of Daniel Wissler, was the ninth of 13 children. She died when William O. was about six weeks old. She was the daughter of David Wagner (1800-1878) and Lydia Hauck Wagner, who married in 1825.

**Lydia Catherine (Aunt Kate) Wissler (1867-1939)** was the daughter of Daniel and Matilda, and William O. Wissler's older sister. She married Luther Young and had two children, Esta Young (1888 - ) and Charles Young.

**Esta Young** married Earl Barefoot (1869 – 1938). They lived in Cambridge City, Indiana. Later in life, after Earl died, Esta lived with a companion Muriel who perhaps helped take care of her. Esta had dropsy/edema (?). Barbie remembers Esta's house in Cambridge City and its porcelain figurines collection that Betty says were made in Cambridge City.

**David Peter Wissler (1860/1865 - 1932)**, William O. Wissler's older brother, known as "Uncle Dave".

**William Oscar Wissler (1874 - 1948)**, son of Daniel Wissler, father of Bob and Eleanor Wissler, husband of Bertha Muriel Thomas Wissler. His mother, Matilda Wagner Wissler died when he was about six weeks old. Lydia Wissler Bower, his aunt, and Francis Bower, raised him in their home. They had no children. William O. died at age 74. In 1903 he married Muriel Thomas and they lived at 716 National Road West. His obituary in the Richmond Indiana Palladium on March 8, 1948 reported that he was principal of Hibberd Junior High school until 1944. He was born on a farm near Hagerstown and went to a one-room school house in Jefferson township. He was an elementary school teacher in Richmond, principal of Finley school, principal of a high school in Madison, Indiana, a high school teacher in Richmond for 10 years, and superintendent in Hagerstown from 1920 to 1926. He was a member of the Masonic lodge at Cambridge City and the Knights of

**Pythias in Hagerstown. He was an elder of the First Presbyterian church and a member of the local Lions and City Farmers clubs.**

**Bertha Muriel Thomas Wissler (1881 – 1965), called Muriel, married William O. Wissler in 1903 and was the daughter of Lydia Ellen Payne and Reuben Thomas. She was honored as a “study leader” at the Joseph Moore School in May of 1929. A newspaper article with her picture reported that 100 parents and students attended the celebration, which included a farewell play “Everyday Gold” and a student violin solo. She was a charter member of the Criterion Club and a former member of several civic clubs.**

**Muriel wrote that John Jacob Wagner was born in 1729 and died in 1800, father of George Michael (1771-1829). Their son David (1800-1878) was the father of Matilda, William O. Wissler’s mother.**

**Reuben Thomas (1849 – 1919), Muriel Thomas Wissler’s father, was son of Henry Thomas and Tacie Neal Thomas. Henry Thomas was born in Montgomery County, Ohio. He was a farmer. They had 13 children. When Tacie died in 1877 he married Rachel Wiltsie. Tacie was the daughter of Benjamin and Susannah Elleman Neal of Miami County, Ohio.**

**Rachel Elliott Wiltsie Thomas (1845-1933) was the daughter of Isaac and Rachel Overman Elliott. She grew up on a homestead near Marion which became the site of the National Soldiers home. Named after her mother, Rachel was raised as a Quaker and became a school teacher. In 1869 she married George Wiltsie and had five children, two of whom died early. After Wiltsie died, she married Henry Thomas in 1883 and moved to Hemlock, [Indiana?]. Henry Thomas had eight children. Rachel became a minister of the gospel in the Quaker meeting in Hemlock and conducted weddings and funerals. The brief biography that accompanied her memorial service records that Rachel “fell asleep in that sleep of death in the forenoon of January 16, 1933, age 87 and 7 months.” She was survived by ten grand children, eight great-grandchildren, and twenty-one step-grandchildren. She also had adopted two children.**

**Edgar Thomas (1877 - ), brother of Muriel suffered shell-shock in World War I. Edgar never married and lived in the YMCA. During the war he served in France in the air force. He is buried at Crown Point cemetery. In 1949 Edgar wrote to Muriel that Liberty Magazine in 1948 had published an article about Lowell Thomas suggested that he may have been part of the same "Thomas clan." He also wrote that their grandfather Thomas was buried at Arba Cemetary about 16 miles north of Richmond. Edgar wrote "The original Thomases came from England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and were granted a large tract of land along a river in South Carolina," though they moved later to North Carolina. "Two hundred men by the name of Thomas served in the Revolutionary war." "When the slavery question became real hot the Quaker Thomas folks, the Neals, the Paynes, the Lyttons trekked northward in their covered wagons. The Thomas and Neal families settled near Phillipsburg, Ohio and held family reunions on the Isaac Thomas farm there... Grandma Rachel Thomas gave me a McGuffey 3<sup>rd</sup> Reader that she used as a school girl and the Thomas family scroll in a glass frame. Some of Grandpa Thomas's brothers settled in or near Winfield Kansas. Some settled in Iowa." He suggested that the Earlham College library and the Richmond library might have more information on the Thomases.**

**William Payne (1818 – 1860) was Muriel's grandfather on her mother's side, married to Susan Lytton Payne (1826- ). His father was John Payne (1772 - ), married to Rebecca Ford (1784 - ). They lived near Bedford Indiana and are buried on the old Payne Homestead near Bedford. William Payne came to Taylor Township in Howard County from Bedford with a deed for 80 acres of land signed by President Zachary Taylor in 1849. That original land grant document is in the family archives. The farm had a log house. William Payne died at 42 from a fall on the ice that left him partially paralyzed. They had 10 children. The Lytton family came from North Carolina. Susan was the fifth daughter of Ezrom Lytton and Lydia Sherril.**

**Lydia Ellen Payne (1851 – 1936), Muriel's mother, grew up on that farm. She had blue eyes, Muriel reported.**

**B.F. Wissler (1848-1942) father of Clark Wissler, contributed family history passed down by Muriel Wissler to Bob and Betty Wissler.**

**Clark Wissler, son of B.F.Wissler.**

**Eleanor Wissler Lindley (1908 - 1997) married Aaron Lindley and had one son, William Thomas Lindley, called "Bill".**

**Robert William Wissler (1917 – 2006)**

## **SOURCES**

**Eleanor Wissler Lindley, "This is Her Life" (typed notes, no dates).**

**Bob Wissler, My First 77 Years.**

**Betty Wissler, conversations.**