



CHAPTER 1

First Pages of the Story

To begin this book, it's helpful to set the stage with two vignettes showing William Borden during his graduate student days at Princeton.

For if his life was one that now verges on legend, it's the more important to remember that any such legend comes only from the life that inspired it. We need to know what William Borden was like on days when he navigated his sloop at sea, was profiled in newspapers alongside stories of the Wright Brothers,¹ or spoke with those who knew him. As far as possible, we need to see him as he really was.

For there is where the best story lies.



In summer 1910 William Borden, age twenty-two, sailed for Europe to spend three weeks in Hanover, for intensive study of German to aid his linguistic studies at Princeton Theological Seminary. During this time, he visited Berlin and his good friend from Yale, Kenneth Latourette (later an eminent scholar of church history). Latourette described Borden as 'an able student,'² but during their weekend visit, all studies were set aside for the sights and sounds of Berlin, good conversation, and very likely bicycling,

1. See page 2 of *The Mariposa Gazette*, Saturday, 31 July 1909.

2. See *Beyond the Ranges* (1967), pp. 35-36 and p. 39.

as Borden was an avid cyclist during his stays in Europe – ever the student athlete he'd been at Yale.³

To hear this story recalls a wistful reflection, expressed by Edmund Morgan when writing of Benjamin Franklin; but it is no less true of William Borden—

But we may be permitted a small regret ... for having been born too late to enjoy his company. We can never catch the warmth of his smile, the tone of his voice, the little gestures, the radiant presence that drew people to him wherever he went.⁴

Some figures from history prompt a wish that we'd met them.

Around the time of Borden's visit in Germany with Latourette, he wrote a prescient and haunting letter to his friend and mentor, Dr Henry Weston Frost, a much-respected leader of China Inland Mission. Taking up his pen on Wednesday, July 20th, Borden said that during his stay, 'people talk about peace (in Peace Congresses), but in reality, here in Europe, they are preparing for a great struggle, I believe. The opinion seems to be that Germany will soon be ready to make a grab for more territory, which she badly needs, etc.'⁵

Even then, four summers before August 1914, Borden saw gathering storm clouds of war. He would not live to see the outbreak of World War I, but he saw worrying signs of a coming conflict: one to afflict so many of his generation.

Borden's sojourn in Europe was revealing in that it showed him to be a keen observer of people and events; but equally so is

3. See Taylor, *Borden of Yale* (1926), pp. 181-182. As Borden's close friend Robert Wilder (founder of the Student Volunteer Movement) said of Borden's one-time visit with Wilder and his family in their Norwegian home: '[William] took a real interest in our home-life and all our doings. He helped [my] children to learn to ride their bicycles, running by each of them in turn.'

4. See the Preface to *Benjamin Franklin*, by E. S. Morgan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. ix.

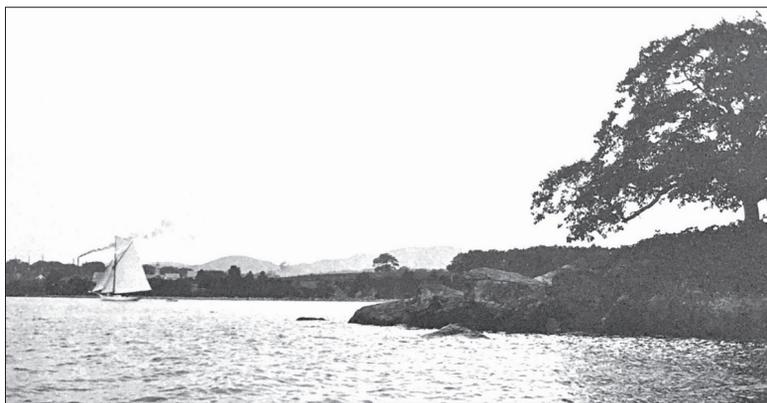
5. See Taylor, *Borden of Yale* (1926), pp. 182-183. The last sentence of this quote is from a letter Borden wrote to H. W. Frost from Hanover, Germany, Wed., July 20, 1910, housed at The Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College.

an account that comes to us from a very different place: the coast of Maine in New England.

Among the many revealing postcards taken of Camden, Maine from the time that William Borden and his family summered there, one stands out. It seems less a postcard than it does an artist's wish to capture a moment and place.

A close look at the picture shows the photographer had set out early to get a photo of the inland sea as the morning mist lifted from the waters of a small cove. Small clusters of white effervesce and rise; and smoke swells lazily from a chimney in the distance. A sailboat stands out to sea; getting underway for an early cruise.

It's a 'friendship sloop' just like the one the Borden family owned – in fact, the photographer may well have taken a photograph, unaware, of the *Tsatsawassa*, the name the Bordens gave their sloop – one possibly taken from the fine, sonorous Native American name of a lake in Rensselaer County, New York state.



An early 1900s scene from Camden, Maine, where a fine sloop like the Borden family's *Tsatsawassa* stands out to sea (from the author's photo collection, postcard dated 1906).

'The Bordens,' one family member has said, 'loved the water, and yachts.'⁶ All his life, William Borden kept that abiding love of sailing and the sea.

6. Author email correspondence with Gail Borden, Thursday, August 31, 2017.

His friend Captain Arey knew this better than most.⁷ ‘I’ve known him ever since he first come to Camden,’ the Captain remembered fondly, and with more than a trace of a native Mainer’s accent and speech:

When he came up in the spring, he always shook hands with everybody. All the summer people don’t do that. If ’twas a stranger or a fisherman, didn’t make no difference. He always spoke to everybody – like as if he wanted to, and shook hands with them.

[Aboard ship,] he was always singing ... He’d climb away up the riggin’ ... He did everything well he tried to do. He was so strong, too!

When he’d go out and work at the riggin’ I’d be afraid he’d break the sail, he was so strong ... [But] he could take a chart, and go anywhere with it. Of course, he’d studied into it, and learned it ...

William was a nice hand to sail a boat. You didn’t need no one else when he was along ... Sometimes he’d steer, and sometimes he’d help with the sails, but he was an expert on the boat.⁸

Notwithstanding differences in their backgrounds—Captain Arey a native Mainer, Camden born and bred, and Borden the cultured son of a wealthy, prominent Chicago family—like recognized like in their friendship. Arey respected Borden as a gifted and dedicated mariner. In a word, he was a born sailor.

‘If we was out all night on the boat,’ Arey said, ‘he’d roll in the blanket and sleep on deck. The others would be in the cabin. There might be a bed to spare, but he’d take the deck. He liked it better.’⁹ There were other memories too:

7. Capt. Fremont Arey, as the *Santa Barbara News-Post* refers (Apr. 12, 1912) to John Borden ‘and his captain, Fremont C. Arey, Camden, Maine.’ John Borden was William Borden’s elder brother. Further, page 21 of the 1902–3 *Camden [Phone] Directory* lists ‘Arey, Fremont C., yachtsman.’ Author correspondence with Ken Gross of Camden Public Library, on Friday, 26 Oct. 2018, confirms F. C. Arey (b. 1863) was a ‘master mariner.’

8. See Taylor, *Borden of Yale* (1926), p. 162.

9. *ibid.*, p. 163.

It was blowin' awful heavy one night – dark and rainy. Two other fellers was out with us, [William's] friends. About two o'clock in the morning, the bran' new boat we was towin', the steam-launch, rolled over and sunk, the rope parted. I remember what he said.

'The boat's gone,' he called down to the other fellers—

'We can go faster now!'

Lots and lots of boats that night that was about as big as the *Tsatsawassa* was wrecked – that is, the sails were torn, and the spars broke, so that they had to be towed in. The storm commenced about eleven o'clock. James Perry and another of William's friends was with us. I don't think any of us slept. I know I didn't, and know William didn't.

It was about six o'clock next morning when we got into Beverley Farms and anchored (after a record run of nearly two hundred miles in eighteen hours). When all was made safe, William said:

'Now we'll have family prayers, and give thanks for gettin' in.'¹⁰

This pointed to another side of who William Borden was: for he possessed a faith that ran deep, strong, and abiding – like the waters of the sea he so loved.

Captain Arey had seen that too, and he remembered:

When he and I'd go out alone sometimes, I'd ask where he'd like to go.

'Anywhere,' he'd say, 'so as to get out where it's quiet.'

And he'd go down into the [ship] cabin with his Bible, or some other book, and study all the time we was out.

It might be three hours or so. And when we'd come in, he'd seem to be kind of refreshed in his mind.¹¹

For Borden, it was a time to contemplate, and consider things of eternity.

10. *ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

11. *ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

‘What is your goal?’ he once wrote, ‘and Who is in the boat with you? May each one of us be able to say ... He is not only on board, but at the helm.’¹²

It was an eloquent phrase, summoning images of a pilgrim’s voyage.

A journey of faith.



89 Bellevue Place, Chicago, the handsome late-Victorian residence where William Borden was born (from the author’s 1st British edition copy of *Borden of Yale*, 1926).

But all journeys have their beginnings, and though Camden would always hold a special place in Borden’s life, he was born in Chicago, America’s great city of the Midwest, where he and his consequential family had important ties.

William Borden’s story began on Tuesday, November 1, 1887. Outside the walls of 89 Bellevue Place, Chicago, strong winds blew in a gale from the north.¹³ But within the durable walls of blue Bedford Stone that graced the stately French Chateau William Borden Sr. built for his family,¹⁴ the forceful winds were scarcely more than a rumor of sound. And there, a new son was born in the Borden family.



12. W. W. Borden, ‘The Origin of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions,’ in *The Christian Workers* magazine, March 1913, p. 456.

13. See the weather forecast for November 1st given on page 15 of the October 30, 1887 edition of *The Chicago Tribune*.

14. ‘A permit was issued last week to Mr William Borden for the erection of a three-story residence at 87 and 89 Bellevue Place. It was designed by E. M. Hunt of New York, and will be a very handsome structure. The exterior will be constructed of Blue Bedford stone and the interior will be furnished in an elaborate manner. It will cost \$50,000.’ See the May 8, 1886 issue of *The Sanitary News* (Chicago: The Sanitary News, 1886), p. 26.