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## UA37/44 Diary to Kelly

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January 17, 1968

In a great many ways 1968 is Anniversary Year. Sixty years ago this very month--day after tomorrow--I came to Bowling Green to enter school at the Western Kentucky State Normal School. Fifty years ago, also this month, I came back to Western, knowing for the first time that I was to be permanent and also a teacher of English. On April 1 our daughter will be fifty years old, another half-century anniversary. Nothing of unusual importance makes 1928 outstanding; hence forty years ago can be overlooked. Thirty years ago, in 1938, I began my ecological study of the Mammoth Cave National Park. And ten years ago this fall I began my last year as a teacher at Western. There is nothing world-shaking about the dates that seem so important to me as mileposts in my life, but every life needs, and has, just such dates. It is not often that so many ten-year periods bring so many dates.

Naturally, I am thinking most, these days, about 1908 and my first coming to Bowling Green. In a great many ways that date is very important. I do not know what would have happened to me if I had not come then or soon afterwards. As I have so often said, I cannot make a connected story of how I determined to come here in the first place. I wish I could do just that, for it might help me judge hosts of other people whom I have known, who came and saw and conquered, and others, with everything in their favor, came, dropped out, and disappeared. In looking over some of my diaries of 1917 and 1918 I have run across some almost tearful passages that tell how I failed in trying to get some promising young man to stay in school. I used all the arguments I knew and still failed. And some of the fellows I tried so hard to keep here have literally disappeared. A few have retained a sort of connection with Western, by sending younger friends or even children here; but often these have occupied positions far below what they could have held if they had stayed

on a while longer. I have often said, in this diary, that some of our older teachers ought to be held responsible for the waning ambitions of some of our former students. Two or three of the old-timers lost no opportunity to belittle college and one went so far as to say, outright, that all a fellow needed to become educated was to pick up a book and start educating himself. Frankly, I am often amazed that even as large a number stayed on as did. The odds were against us, among our earlier acquaintances and often on the campus.

Since December 26, and the prolonged wintry weather, I have recalled dozens of events connected with the cold winter of 1917-18, fifty years ago. The winter actually began, say those who were here, in the first week in December, and some of that week's snow was still on the ground, covered up by successive layers of snow and ice, when I came back here from Indiana University on January 26, 1918. Never, before or since, have I seen such a drab world as we saw out the train windows as we came from Bloomington to Bowling Green. At Louisville the Ohio River was so solidly frozen over that people on foot and in buggies and wagons were crossing as if on solid ground. The snow had been cleared from a portion of each street, and piles of dirty snow, stained by coal soot, sometimes occupied fully half of such streets as Broadway. Hosts of people were coming and going by train, hundreds of them soldiers at Camp Taylor. When we got to Bowling Green, we found it impossible to hire someone to take us out <sup>looking for</sup> housekeeping quarters. I rented a horse and buggy from a livery stable and spent several hours driving that horse in a slow, skidding walk over iced streets. The house where we found rooms had had every water pipe frozen, but it was that one or <sup>a</sup> prolonged search in horrible weather for something else. Fortunately, our nearest neighbor was Professor Stickles. For six days we had to tote every drop of water we used from his house to ours, before the plumbers could get around to our busted pipes. Water at Western was so badly frozen up that we had, for weeks, an outbreak of itch.

The weather in January, 1918, bad as it was, was mild as compared with the morale. Boys were leaving every day to join the military forces; sometimes half a class would leave in a week. Nobody seemed to know what advice to give, and there was a general feeling that every able-bodied boy should volunteer at once, whether he was qualified or not for the service sought. With many programs related to the war being given, we kept busy, and somehow managed to survive the winter and the gloom. But it took some steely nerves to last. Because I kept a diary through 1917 and until after the close of World War I on November 11, 1918, this period of my life is well documented. I found a passage in one of my diaries that I approved highly, recently: I mentioned that I rarely said anything about the war as I wrote in my diary and frankly attributed this neglect to the overwhelming attention given to the war every day at school and in the press. My diary, with its accounts of my readings and bird observations, became a run-away place in the time of great stress.

Twenty years after the Great War, as we called it, and just before its successor, that is, in early 1938, I began my persistent study of changes in the bird life of Mammoth Cave National Park caused by the retirement from cultivation of the 50,000 acres of the area. This furnished and still furnishes a constant opportunity to observe and to interpret my observations in terms of ecology. During World War II my numerous trips and camps in the park helped cover over some of the sorrow and intensity of the time. After a week's teaching it was a relief to get outside, here or there, and forget for a brief while the accumulated troubles of the world. My Mammoth Cave studies also helped intensify my liking for the natives of that region and laid the foundation for all my further work there, in ornithology and in folklore. My earlier trips to the park, because of poor roads, were not so numerous as they later became each year, but I managed to prolong as many of them as possible, at weekends and in vacation times. I left my camping

equipment at the Maintenance Garage and could thus go up by bus or train to Cave City and ride out to the park with someone who had come to get freight or express or to attend to banking duties. Many a trip I made in this way, very rarely, in the war years, getting to the park in my car. I can now recall only twice that I had that privilege, for I was asked to come to commencements on my own gas, and then my tank would be filled with school-bus gas for a return trip to Bowling Green or by way of Mammoth Cave. Realizing the great opportunity in thus being able to get around, I literally worked every hour of such trips to learn more about the bird populations. Somehow the older employees of the park remember this phase of my many, many visits there as the most distinctive time. Rarely does a month pass, even now, without someone's recalling when I would make the garage my headquarters for several days and would walk everywhere or go with the rangers on some of their rounds.

The shortest ten years of the eighty that I am now some months into came from 1958 to 1968, the most recent years of this list of ten-year events. In September, 1958, I began my last teaching year, tired to begin with, for I had not rested in the summer as much as I tried to. From the very first day in that last school year someone would almost daily cry on my shoulder and proclaim that Western would never again be itself with me away. I held up well before people, but this gloomy talk actually kept me from being as bouncy as I wanted to be. It was a daily event to remind my well-wishers that Western had been here before I arrived, and that it would be around a long time <sup>after</sup> I had closed my office door and gone back to 1434 Chestnut Street. It actually took me months after my retirement to get my full strength back, but it seems to have got a new lease on life, as is proved by how well I have felt and how active I have been since somewhere in the school year. 1959-60.