

An Idaho Farmer in France

So far, in past issues of Home & Harvest Magazine, I've been writing the story of the John and Mary Lorang homestead in Genesee, Idaho. Many of the activities on the Lorang farm in Genesee were very similar to what other pioneers also tried to do on their homesteads in this area, but John had documented it all with photographs and journals. Here is a story though that is a little different for an Idaho farmer of 110 years ago.

In April of 1910, John and Mary Lorang began a long awaited 6 month journey through the U.S. by train to New York City, then aboard ship to Europe and the Middle East. They had heard tell of the Cook's Tours to these ancient sites and joined up with a U.S. church group to make the travels affordable. John was raising barley and wheat, selling potatoes, apples, peaches, cherries, cream, pumpkins, berries, milk cows, even goldfish to the Davenport hotel in Spokane, homemade wooden washing machines and hogs. According to John's 1910 ledger, a large sale of hogs was needed to gather funds for the trip. Even after they had started off and were in Spokane, preparing for the train to New York City; they realized this amount wouldn't be enough for the whole trip and wired back home that more hogs would need to be sold and please wire the extra funds.

According to Mary Gesellchen Lorang's 1910 journal:

"Diary of the trip we have stardet, Hope that God will Bless us to end it in health and return again to Genesee, Idaho.

Thurs. April 7th, 1910, we left home to go as far as Spokane and from their to stard the long trip that was planed for many years, but when I left my heartached to leave behind my dear once!"

English was the 2nd language to John and Mary Lorang, who spoke only German in the home until 1902.

John writes: "April 7, 1910, Diary of a trip trough Italy, Egipt, Palestine and Europe."

During the 6 month tour Mary Gesellchen Lorang's sister, Tina Gesellchen Smolt of Genesee, offered to help with the children; since the youngest child Charles was still only 8 years old. The local seamstress, Miss Clemens, also stayed with the children and made the girls dresses, while everyone was writing letters to Mama and Pa. Several letters and postcards have been found here, as well as the two journals written by both John and Mary Lorang, along with a detailed ledger of expenses of the trip. The dresses made by Miss Clemens were found in steamer trunks in the 1878 Log cabin and are now on display in the Farmhouse museum, White Spring Ranch, Genesee.

This incredible trip in 1910 changed the trajectory of the rest of John Lorang's life. After viewing the remarkable sights of this time in Europe and the Middle East, he developed an interest in photography and other creative arts. Over 300 artistic photographs were taken of this 6 month trip by an Idaho farmer and his wife. John took most of these, but Mary had to give it a try for John to be included in the photos. John would get close up photographs of people from each country. He would climb hills, buildings and posts for the right angle for his 1909 Eastman Kodak Brownie pocket camera. John's favorite phrase in his extensive journal was "*the grandest thing I ever saw!?*". If there is any item that John may have left out, we can always read Mary's journal where she wrote each day in even more detail.

John and Mary traveled from Spokane to New York City to Italy, the Middle East, through the Ottoman Empire and back to Europe through Italy, France, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Germany, then England.

John writes: "*My wife and I left our home in Genesee, Idaho, on April 7 to travel to New York, where we took the steamboat "Berlin" with the final destination of Naples, Italy, on April 23rd. We were traveling with a group of 175 American pilgrims, (traveling for an audience with the Pope in Rome.) This group was led by Bishop Eis von Marquette. We arrived in Naples, Italy, on May 4th.*"

John wrote little here about the trip across the ocean, but if we check his journal, he says that it took 12 days of travel; with the ship averaging 400 miles a day depending on the winds. He had been sick during at least some of the time, but entered daily notes in his journal.

Four months later John wrote a short article and sent it back home for the *Genesee News*.

"Berlin, Germany, August 8, 1910

I wish to let you and all of our Genesee friends know that we are still alive and we have enjoyed our trip so far, notwithstanding the fact that the weather was very hot in the Orient during our stay there, the later part of May and the fore part of June. However, since we have climbed the Alps to a height of over 12,000 ft. above sea level, where there is perpetual snow, we have gotten so chilled that we are not yet thawed out. The weather all through Europe has been exceptionally cool and wet, the several countries having sustained heavy losses of life and property from the rains and floods. From here we go to Brussels, Belgium and from there to London, England. On the 17th of this month we board the steamer 'Crown Prince Wilhelm' at South Hampton, England for the States. Our home sweet home."

Along with the over 300 photographs, John and Mary brought home books, receipts, artifacts and stories. This trip established John's interest as a photographer and the story of the 1910 journey traveled down through the generations, through the families and children, of this incredible man and his wife who thought that travel was the greatest thing one could ever achieve, yet longed to be back home again.





Damascus, Syria and Koln, Germany, 1910 by John Lorang

