

Hope at the Helm

A

ISIDE

Selections From
HOPE NEEDHAM'S
HOUSEHOLD COLUMN
in the
Corn Belt Farm Dailies
1925 - 1964

Selected from more than 10,000 columns-
Dedicated to the memory of Hope
by her children, for their children
July, 1990

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Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Hope at the helm (1925). | 2 |
| 1926 | 11 |
| 1927 | 22 |
| 1928 | 33 |
| 1929-1932 | 38 |
| 1933-1934 | 56 |
| 1935-1938 | 63 |
| Hope and Jim on vacation (1935). . . | 64 |
| Ruth advises college-bound | 70 |
| 1939-1940 | 75 |
| 1941-1942 | 81 |
| 1943-1948 | 84 |
| Wilbert reports on Holy Land (1946). . | 88 |
| 1951-1952 | 94 |
| Hope heads west with Margi (1952). . | 105 |
| 1953-1964 | 115 |
| Chapel of Hope (1963-1964) | 118 |
| Tribute to JFK--and response (1963). . | 120 |
| Hope to retire (1964). | 124 |
| How does she do it ? (1928). | 125 |
| Hope looks back (1964) | 126 |
| Epilogue (1925). | 129 |

Hope Needham, Retired Editor Household, Dies

Hope Needham, editor of the Household column in the Drovers Journal and its sister publications for over 38 years until her retirement Jan. 1, 1965, died suddenly Dec. 27.



Hope Needham

Her son, W. N. Stevenson, reported that the long-time woman's column editor and writer died "peacefully", although she had been in failing health. She had sent a Christmas greeting to the readers of the Household for the Dec. 21 issue of Drovers Journal.

Hope Needham, who was Mrs. James V. (Lucile) Stevenson, lived on a farm near Streator, Ill., where she led a busy life as wife of a farmer, mother and editor of the Household column. She retired from active direction of the column at the end of 1964, ending 38½ years at the task with a series of reflective articles which her readers prized highly.

Mrs. Stevenson became editor of the column in the mid-1920's after the death of Faith Felgar, an Iowa farm woman who had conducted the column successfully for many years. During her regime, hundreds of thousands of letters from farm readers were received and handled, many of them going into the column to provide the daily reading fare for a faithful "flock".

High-principled and firm in her beliefs, Mrs. Stevenson conducted the column on a high plane, although she let all readers "have their say" to the extent that space permitted. She was the recipient of much praise and numerous honors, although of a retiring nature in her latter years.

One of the notable expressions of appreciation for her work occurred in 1963 when secret communications among Household readers resulted in a surprise party in her honor. Culmination was the presentation of a check to Hope for a charity close to her heart, the establishment of a mission in Rio Muni in Africa. The project, named "Flowers for the Living," by Householders, drew modest contributions from thousands of House-

hold readers. A recent article and picture in the Household column reported that the chapel project is now nearing completion.

Mrs. Stevenson was a gifted writer who often contributed her own thoughts and ideas as lead articles for the column. Her comments on national events were clipped and saved by readers as prime examples of good writing. The death of President John F. Kennedy stirred Mrs. Stevenson to write a tribute which showed the deep compassion for her fellow men and a clear understanding of what is in their hearts.

Mrs. Stevenson was preceded in death by her husband, in 1959, and by her only daughter, in 1962. These personal losses, she wrote in her column upon announcing her retirement, "took much of the zest out of life," although her sons and their families became her great interest in life after she gave up the column.

STREATOR TIMES-PRESS

Thursday, Dec. 28, 1967

Prominent Local Woman Passes Away

Mrs. Lucile N. Stevenson passed away at the home of her son, Wilbert, Route 4, Streator, Wednesday evening.

Services will be Saturday at 1:30 p.m. from the Park church with burial in Allen cemetery, Ransom.

Visitation will be after 4 p.m. Friday at the Elias funeral home, and until 11 a. m. Saturday when the body will be taken to the church.

Memorials may be directed to the Park church Memorial fund.

Mrs. Stevenson was born Sept. 26, 1893 in Nebraska, daughter of William A. and Alice (Brown) Needham. She married James V. Stevenson Oct. 12, 1916 in Urbana. He preceded her in death Oct. 17, 1959.

Mrs. Stevenson had resided in Streator since 1916 and was a ruling elder of Park church and taught an adult class there for many years.

She was a member of the Callere club, past president of the Illinois Home Bureau and a member of the state rural electrification committee, whose recommendations hastened the development of electric power in rural areas.

Mrs. Stevenson was the editor of a household column of the Corn Belt Farm Dailies for almost 40 years under the pen name of Hope Needham.

Upon her retirement in 1965 readers of the column donated a fund to build the "Chapel of Hope" in Rio Muni, West Africa, as a tribute to her inspiration.

She served for several years as secretary of the Allen-Otter Creek Mutual Fire Insurance Co.

Survivors include three sons, Wilbert, Streator; Ernest, Bloomington; Joseph, Fairbury; 15 grandchildren; four sisters, Mrs. Carrie Brown, Mrs. Revilo (Grace) Oliver, and Mrs. Marguerite Rarick, all of Urbana.

She was preceded in death by her husband, one daughter, Mrs. Philip (Ruth) Sidell, and one brother, Wilbert Needham.

Bloomington Pantagraph

Mrs. Lucille Stevenson

STREATOR — Mrs. Lucile Stevenson, 74, died Wednesday evening at the home of her son, Wilbert, Route 4, Streator.

Her funeral will be Saturday at 1:30 p.m. at the Park Church, with burial in Allen Cemetery at Ransom.

Visitation will be after 4 p.m. today at the Elias Funeral Home in Streator, and until 11 a.m. Saturday, when she will be taken to the church.

Mrs. Stevenson was born Sept. 26, 1893 in Nebraska, a daughter of William A. and Alice Brown Needham. She was married to James V. Stevenson Oct. 12, 1916 at Urbana. He died in 1959.

She had lived in Streator since 1916 and was a ruling elder of Park Church. She taught an adult class there many years.

She was a member of the Callere Club, past president of the Illinois Home Bureau, and a member of the State Rural Electrification Committee whose recommendations hastened the development of electric power in rural areas.

Mrs. Stevenson was editor of a household column of the corn belt farm dailies. They appeared for almost 40 years under the pen name of Hope Needham.

Surviving are three sons, Wilbert, Streator; Ernest, 213 Fleetwood Drive, Bloomington; and Joseph, Fairbury.

August 23, 1990

Dear Carol
Dick
Mark

Perhaps you remember that your ^{anunt} ~~grandmother~~ Lucile Stevenson edited a daily household column for nearly forty years, under the pen name of Hope Needham.

In 1965, in recognition of her retirement, your ^{cousin} ~~uncle~~ Joe assembled and presented to her a booklet containing several of her early columns. A limited number of these booklets were made. ^{We} I can't remember whether we sent you a copy or not.

After seeing this booklet, ^{part} Will, Joe, and I decided that we should compile a more complete selection of her writings and publish it in book form. Hope had clipped and saved all of her columns (more than 10,000 of them). At that time we thought that some of her loyal readers (as well as the family) might be interested in such a book.

We divided among us the scrapbooks filled with clippings and began the enjoyable but laborious task of reading all of the columns and selecting the ones to be used. We did not have a well defined criteria for selection, so each of us used somewhat different judgements as to what to keep and what to discard. The job was much more time consuming than we had anticipated, and after a year or so the project bogged down and lay dormant for many years.

A couple of years ago we decided we either should ^{this} complete the project or abandon it. By ~~that time it was~~ obvious that any interest in the book would ~~essentially~~ be limited to family members. Most of the columns we had selected were family-related rather than of general interest. And by this time, most of Hope's most loyal readers who were her contemporaries had died.

At long last we have a book, of sorts. It is not fancy because the print quality is no better than could be captured by photostat and photocopy of ancient newspaper clippings. But it brings back many memories to us. The book is titled "Hope at the Helm", and is dedicated to Hope. ~~Enough copies were made for her children and grandchildren.~~

by her children.

Initially, copies were distributed to Hope's children and grandchildren. Their favorable reactions led us to think that the "cousins" might also like to have copies, to add to their memories. Hence this mailing.

We felt that you would like to have a copy of the book, because you knew her well in your younger days. Also your mother Ruth is prominent both as a subject of Hope's comments and as a contributor to the column.

This is not a book to read in one sitting. But you can open it almost at random (particularly in the early years) and in a few pages get a feeling of Hope's personality and Philosophies. Two of my favorite items are on pages 129 and 125.

You will notice that prior to WW II there are numerous columns included for each year, and many reports on Hope's family. After WW II, however, there are gaps of months and years, and fewer references to children and grandchildren. There appear to be three reasons for this. First, we are told that one of her readers about that time wrote a very critical letter about her frequent references to family. Hope was an extremely sensitive person, and immediately reacted by almost eliminating family reports. It is evident from later letters that most readers did not share this view, and in fact urged her to resume her family updates.

Second, during the period that our book project lay dormant, some of the clippings got lost. And third, as the years passed Hope did less of her own writing and more editing and compiling of the voluminous contributions from readers.

We all hope you will enjoy "Hope at the Helm".

Best regards to all!

Ernie Stevenson
from all the Stevensons
with our best wishes
(mailed by Ernie)

HOPE AT THE HELM

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1965*

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SELECTIONS FROM
HOPE NEEDHAM'S
HOUSEHOLD COLUMN
IN THE
CORN BELT FARM DAILIES
1925 - 1965

SELECTED, REPRINTED, AND DEDICATED TO HOPE
BY HER CHILDREN
MAY, 1965