

The
Gordon
Travelogue

Volume 2

Norman G. Gordon, Editor

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Preface to Volume 2

It has been difficult to find willing contributors to this year's travelogue. The editor has come upon a likely cause for this dearth of material: the first volume was only distributed to one family member. In a flash of brilliance, the editor concluded that if other family members had a chance to read previous volumes of the travelogue, they might have some idea of what in the world they could offer!

The editor makes a solemn promise to the Gordon clan that this year's volume as well as all past volumes - in this case, volume 1 - will be distributed far and wide such that there will not be a Gordon on the face of the earth (no small area, mind you!) who has not had access to these compilations of our family heritage.

This volume is heavily indebted to my father, the recipient of the first volume, who has provided the editor with two of this year's three entries.

December 18, 1994

The "Gordon Brothers"

[Editor's Note: The following story is an excerpt from a document recently obtained by Gary Gordon briefly recounting the life and work of numerous generations of 18th and 19th century Gordons. It is written by Albert S. Gordon, cousin of William W. Gordon (b. 1866), father of Donald C. Gordon (b. 1897). This excerpt chronicles the lives of four brothers: David (father of William W.), Andrew, George (father of the author), and Peter. The four ended up in a partnership of a "tin shop and rag room" business called "Gordon Brothers."]

My father, George E. Gordon, was born in Auburn, New York, August 25, 1845. He came to Thompsonville with his parents in 1848 and thence to Hazardville around 1852. In October, 1867, he married Caroline N. Smith, the wedding taking place in Somers, Connecticut. In Hazardville he spent the remainder of his life. Here his three children, Arthur G., Edith M., and Albert S. were born and reared. Here was spent his business life and here he died April, 1923, at the age of 77 years and eight months.

Physically, he stood about five feet ten inches, black hair and moustache, a deep blue eye, the curved or "Gordon" nose. He was spare, not fleshy, moved with a quick step, was quick in thought and motion. He was neat, and orderly in his person and in arrangement of his office and possessions. Always looked as though he had just stepped out of a handbox, was habitually courteous in expression and urbane in deportment. He gave every appearance of being what he was, a shrewd, able, reliable business man and a Christian gentleman.

He frequently or rather occasionally spoke of his boyhood in Scitico. It was marked by plain living and frugal fare. In summer this was varied by apples and plums, peaches and berries. He habitually went barefoot as soon as the weather made it possible and during the winter months was shod in high cowhide boots with brass tips and in these could find protection from snow and mud and other unclemencies of the weather. He prepared the stove wood for his mother's fire. The raw material was four foot wood. He took a buck saw and an axe by which it was sawed and split. He attended the Scitico district school until he was thirteen years old. Here he thoroughly mastered the three "R"s and was always quick at figures and good at mental arithmetic, wrote an excellent business hand and was a reader not only of the daily newspapers and trade periodicals but of literature, history, fiction and biography. Except for one term at Wilbraham Academy, his schooldays were over.

His first employment was with the stockinette concern in Scitico. He ran errands for Mr. Tansley, the agent in charge of the property and ran the little store run by the company. The company did quite a business in hand-knit goods done by housewives and others who took out material and brought back the completed goods. For these people and those who worked in the mill, the store was run. He weighted [sic] out sugar and molasses and other groceries. Here he continued about three years until in 1861 he went to work for the Hazard Powder Company. His work for the latter concern was in the office. He started out with a salary of \$4. per week. His work was here during the Civil War when the plant worked to capacity, making not only powder but cartridges for the government and for several years afterwards. He found the associations congenial and the pay good but the future limited. He had been thrifty and had saved a little and finally decided to look around for a business opening.

While in this mood, he heard that because of the retirement of Mr. Franklin Smith, there would be an opening in his firm. This firm, started some thirty years before, operated a tin shop and rag room together with a retail hardware store. In the tin shop they made tinware, which was distributed by tin peddlers in the country round about and from whom they received rags and junk of various kinds. His brother, David Gordon, had been connected with this concern for a long time and a partner for about eight years. After conference and consideration, he purchased an interest in this business. This was around 1869. A year or two later, he and his brother, David, having bought out the remaining partners, established the firm under the name of Gordon Brothers, in which they were soon joined by their brothers Andrew and Peter, both as partners. The firm continued as a partnership until incorporated soon after the turn of the century.

In this firm David Gordon was the leading member. He had entered the business in his teens learning the trade of tinsmith and sorting and stripping rags in the ragroom. For a short time during the Civil War he worked as a cooper, making powder kegs, but an offer of a partnership brought him back into the business. He was a large man, six foot tall but so deep-chested and so broadly built that he did not look his height nor his weight which was 220 lbs. He had light brown hair and soft grey or light blue eyes with a straight peaked nose and in facial appearance greatly resembled his mother. He had great physical strength and vigor. He walked with a quick light tread, remarkable for a man of his size. He was quick in his motions, and in his thinking. He did the travelling for the firm, covering great distances, considering the horse and buggy days in which he lived, and did most of the selling as well as most of the buying. The success of the business owed much to his ability as a trader.

He was active in the Methodist church, taught a Sunday school class and for nearly if not quite fifty years sang in the choir. He had a clear strong tenor voice. While still in his teens he was made leader of the choir and continued as such for at least forty years. He also sang in concert chorus, solo and quartets, a good voice and a good singer.

George B. Gordon was also musical and while still a boy sang a lot and after his voice changed, baritone. He also sang nearly fifty years in the choir. He also played in the Hazardville Band and performed on the horn - not in my time, however. He also played on the baseball team as pitcher and third baseman.

Andrew Gordon was another brother in the firm. He was Superintendent looking after the ragrooms and in charge of the shipping. He had served as a soldier in the Union Army. He enlisted several months before he was eighteen years old and served throughout the war, being wounded twice, once at the Battle of Antietam, a bullet wound through the body and the second, a burst of shrapnel scarred his left arm in one of the Battles of the Wilderness. He stood about six feet tall, strongly built, not fleshy, Gordon nose, dark hair, active, aggressive, quick-moving. He was active in politics, a Republican, in his younger days was Grand Juror. The latter office took care of the prosecution of minor criminal cases, issued the writ of arrest and presented the case to the Justice of Peace. In his later days, he was in the Connecticut Legislature, representing the Town of Enfield in the lower house and serving one term in the State Senate. He acquitted himself well there, gaining the reputation for integrity and ability, and had not ill-health compelled his retirement from both politics and business might have been Governor of the State.

Peter G. Gordon, the remaining brother, after a few years in the firm, retired and, removing to Norwich, Conn. entered a similar business. I was so young when he left that I do not clearly remember what he did in the business. He resembled in personal appearance his brother, George. He stood about five foot ten inches tall, strongly built, not fleshy, black hair, Gordon nose, grey eyes.

George B. Gordon was the office man, the bookkeeper, kept the accounts by triple entry in Day Book, Journal and Ledger, did the correspondence with pen and ink, entering a copy in the letter press of all important letters, looked after the tin peddlers when they came in with junk and rags and took away a new supply of tinware, brooms, etc. That alone meant quite a stir and bustle, getting out the necessary articles and making proper entries with the credits and debits. A visit from a tinpeddler took some time and if the noon hour coincided dinner was postponed. Sometimes he would get out his apparatus for analyzing the wool content of rags. He first dipped them in an acid which ate out vegetable fiber and then after washing and drying he would weigh it and by comparing the original weight would determine the percentage of wool.

Junior Year Abroad in Sierra Leone

The year was 1955. I was on Christmas vacation from Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone. I was visiting my parents and sister, who were living in the geographical center of that small country, in the town of Maburika, where my dad had a year-long Fulbright scholarship to teach at the teacher training college there. I had reluctantly accompanied my parents to Africa, only when convinced that I would lose nothing from my regular college course by doing this "junior year abroad."

At Fourah Bay College, I was the only white resident student in the history of that institution, founded in the late 1800's. When asked if I experienced any racial discrimination, I say, "No, because I didn't constitute a significantly threatening group." Those were days when the British West African colonies were agitating for independence. Once, I attended a political rally with some colleagues to hear the then famous Nigerian leader, Azikwe. It was held in a theater that was absolutely packed with people hanging out the windows. There was a white Anglican bishop on the stage with other dignitaries. I was standing in the crowd. We were the only two whites present, but Azikwe praised the crowd for their wanting to establish a "multiracial nation." It was amusing to me at the time.

Back to Maburika, and Christmas vacation - I remember walking alone for hours on narrow, one-person-wide paths, between grass so high that I couldn't see over it. I remember coming to openings where there would be a small collection of grass-roofed, mud huts and seeing the people stare at me. I suppose it was dangerous but it all seemed so peaceful and fun to me at the time.

In any case, I did some very basic thinking on those walks alone. I thought about things that I had never even wondered about before. The monologue went something like this: "Dick, before this year you had never been west of Niagara Falls or south of New York City - why are you all of a sudden in Africa?" "Well, this is so strange that maybe God did it." "You mean God interfered in your life and changed things?" "Yeah, maybe he did." "Why would God do such a thing?" "Maybe, He wants me to see Africa so I'll come back here."

Now that was revolutionary thinking for me at the time and it led to other revolutionary thoughts that ended up changing my whole life. I did go back to Africa - to Angola in 1960 - as a teacher with the oldest North American Missionary Society - The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions of the Congregational Churches. I returned to Africa not only believing that God changes things in this life but, especially, in the life to come as well.

Farewell to Butuan City

The music was blaring, there was laughter in the air; in one corner of the house, the Crosby-Still-and-Nash wanna-bes (one of whom was my brother Jim) were singing "Teach Your Children Well" in tight harmony. It was December 10, 1980, my family's last night in Butuan City, a town on the coast of Mindanao, the Southern region of the Philippines, the town where I had lived happily for the first 14 years of my life. The following day we would be bound for Cebu City, and then Manila, and finally the United States to start a new life.

Under the leadership of our third year high school class adviser, Mrs. Silvia de LaTorre, our classmates threw a surprise bon-voyage party at our house for Jim and me. They came bearing lots of food, well-wishes, and good cheer. As the night wore on, some of us gathered around the dining table and played "Truth or Dare." There was quite a bit of teasing going on, as we found out who had a crush on whom - these things happen when people who have known each other for a long time get together, and most of us had been classmates since the fourth grade.

Speaking of crushes, I remember walking across the street that night to the neighborhood store with Bernard. He had a crush on me, so I heard, and I on him, but I never let on. What was the point? We were going to leave anyway. Nonetheless, there was that tingling-kind-of-feeling in the air as we walked back towards the house, only to quickly evaporate when Mama Cita, my maternal grandmother, who met us on our way back from the store, recognized Bernard as the son of a very distant relative. She said to both of us in Butuanon, the native dialect which I can't speak but understand, "Do you know that you're cousins?" The underlying message which we heard loudly and clearly was, "You kids are too closely related to think about anything other than being friends," as if we were going to run off and get married the following day.

The party continued well into the night. There was a lot of talk about what it would be like living in the States. Will we see celebrities? Do we have plans to visit Disneyland? When would we become "balikbayans," a term for Filipinos returning to the Philippines after a long stay abroad. Will I date an American? Will I remember how to speak Cebuano? In other words, will I be so Americanized that I will forget about the Philippines?

Finally, the number of partiers started to dwindle, friends said goodbye, temporarily, because in a few hours they would return for the last goodbye. Several of Jim's friends stayed behind and found a place to 'crash' on our cement floor for the rest of the night. After everybody settled down to sleep, quietness came over our packed house - there were at least 15 people in our two-story three bedroom house. I don't know how the rest of my family slept that night, but I was wide awake, too excited to sleep. I could not believe that "the plan" (this was our term for our family's plan to come to the U.S.), which had been at the top of my family's prayer list for three years, was actually going to unfold in a matter of hours.

On a memorable Sunday, about three years prior to our departure, my father attended the Free Methodist Church in Manila. He was in town for a job interview that Tuesday at the Overseas Employment Development Board. The position he was applying for was as an oil field engineer in Saudi Arabia. For a long time, Papa had talked of going abroad to find better opportunities than what were available in the economically depressed Philippines. Although he was at the height of his career in Butuan City, he felt that he needed to leave the country to provide his family with a better future.

That Sunday, Rev. Ed Garvin, who was a missionary living in Manila at that time, was quite surprised to see my father, a southerner, in church. After Papa shared with him his plans to go to Saudi Arabia, Rev. Garvin asked, "Why do you want to go to Saudi Arabia when it is incredibly hot over there? (I think he said something to that effect) Why not go to the United States instead?" To the Filipinos, United States is a land of golden opportunity. To this, Papa replied, "I don't know anybody there." Actually, he already had connections in the U.S. - former missionaries to the Philippines - and he had been in Pennsylvania for eight months in 1975 on a job training opportunity. He meant that he did not know of any job openings. In response, Rev. Garvin gave Papa the name of his brother-in-law, the late Mr. Paul E. Crouse, founder and former owner of Crouse Cartage Company, based in Carroll, Iowa. According to Papa, he wrote a letter to Mr. Crouse that very day, using Rev. Garvin's office typewriter. That week, Rev. Garvin also placed a phone call to his brother-in-law, informing him that Papa was the man he was looking for. Within ten days, Papa received a letter from Mr. Crouse, inviting him and his family to come to the States. This was a bonus for Papa since he had been preparing to go alone.

After three years of waiting, processing all the right documents and affidavits, and being told that for one year the U.S. Embassy would not allow any travel of persons with our immigration status, December 11, 1980 - the day of our departure - finally dawned. "The plan" was, after all, in God's perfect plan, to be executed under his perfect timing.

On the morning of our departure, the house buzzed with last minute preparations - breakfast (did anybody eat? I don't remember), gathering of mementoes that were given to me by my classmates the night before, collecting our suitcases, last minute instructions given by my Mama and Papa to our helpers and relatives to tie up loose ends, and finally, getting dressed for the airport. At the appointed time, one by one, multi-colored jeepneys crammed with people came by our house - church people, bible college students (my mother taught at a bible college for several years), friends of my parents, my friends and classmates, my siblings' friends and classmates, our relatives - aunts, uncles, and cousins - all came to see us off. Our grandparents, who had been with us in Butuan City the last few weeks, elected to stay behind. We knew that when the time came, it would be difficult for them to see us go. After saying goodbye to our grandparents (surprisingly, I was able to hold back the tears), we piled into separate jeepneys so we could ride with our friends. We caravanned all the way to the airport, and were met by more people there. To me, it seemed that the whole town of Butuan City was at the airport that day, and I truly felt like a celebrity.

I believe that the process of saying goodbye is an important process which must be done correctly. My regret about the way we left was that we did not give ourselves enough time to say goodbye. For three years we kept "the plan" to ourselves, and shared it only with a few relatives and close friends. There was a reason for this. It would be embarrassing to talk about going to the United States (since it is a big deal to go abroad) and have the plan fall through. This had happened to other people, and we didn't want to repeat their experience. So we kept a low profile. Not until two weeks before our departure did we reveal our plans to our friends and classmates. By this time, it was obvious that something was brewing since we had to miss school for about a week to take a trip to Cebu City for health screening and vaccinations.

I distinctly remember the pattern of our conversations at the airport (way back then I was already an observer of people). While waiting for our plane, I visited with my friends, classmates, and relatives, and talked mostly about the excitement and the anticipation of going to a new place. But when we heard the distant drone of the plane, our conversation shifted. I think we were in mass denial until the sound of the plane jolted us to reality. Then the tears started coming. We were frantically saying goodbye to each other. In a matter of minutes, the whole airport was transformed into a sea of tears. As we were shepherded into the glass enclosed waiting area for passengers, I felt as if my heart was ripped apart. I was so overwhelmed with emotions that all I could do was sob. Like a brick wall, it hit me - I may never see some of these people again. Life will go on for them and for me, but things will never be the same again. When will I be able to come back? To a fourteen year old, being able to financially afford a trip back seemed impossible. From our enclosed area, we could not hear what the people outside were saying, but

we were waving goodbye to each other, crying, sobbing. That day, at the Butuan City Airport, remains the saddest day of my 28-year life.

We stayed in Cebu City for a couple of days to say goodbye to some more friends and relatives. From Cebu, we took a ship to Manila, and spent a few more days there saying goodbye to people. On December 16, 1980, we boarded the Philippine Airlines bound for Honolulu, Hawaii, our port of entry to the United States, to begin our new life as immigrants, strangers in a new land, but trusting that this was where God wanted us to be.

On the evening of December 17, 1980, we arrived in Sioux City, Iowa, our new hometown for the next several years. Much to our surprise, we were greeted at our new house by Pastor Charles Kaufmann, the young pastor of the Free Methodist Church, and his family, and by Rev. Jamison, minister of the Wesleyan Church, and his wife.

Looking back, God has been faithful in providing us with "family" here in the United States, which made adjusting to a new way of life easier. The heartache, however, about leaving my homeland had always been there, buried underneath all the 'busy-ness' and demands of school. It was not until graduate school that I began to deal with the loss I felt the day my family and I left the Philippines.