

Book Review

D. Lowell Nissley. *Where Do All the Memories Go? My Life Story and Extended Family Influences, 1921-1997.* Sarasota, FL: Nüssli Haus, 1998. 0-9666379-0-9. [127 pp.].

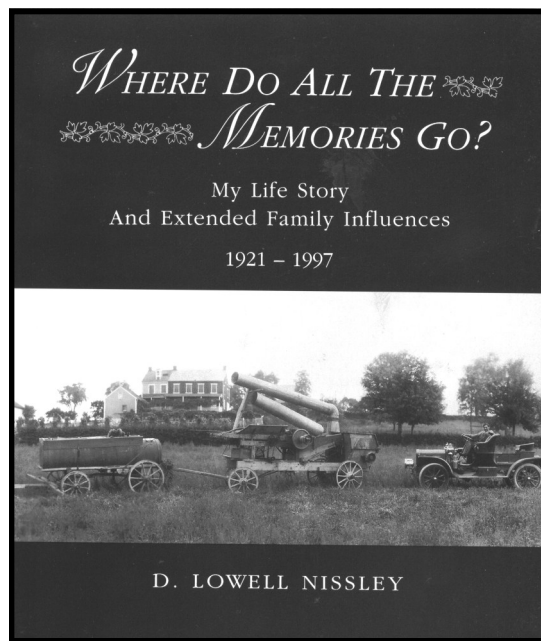
D. Lowell Nissley. *Lincoln Highway: The Road My Father Traveled.* Sarasota, FL: Robert B Abel, 2006. 0-9662719-5-5. 213 pp.

Between them, Lowell Nissley's (1921-) two books are a rambling pictorial narrative of his life. His family lived in Lancaster County, Valley Forge, Collegeville, Lemoyne, and Lionville. The story starts in the 1998 book with Lowell's father, Frank C. Nissley (1882-1981), leaving the family farm in Lancaster County in 1903 at the age of 21 to become an itinerant photographer.

He traveled door to door through the coal regions of Pennsylvania and later Florida, specializing in taking pictures of children inside or outside their homes. His photography crew included "Callers Out" who made an initial sales contact with a child's mother. If she was interested in having a picture, a chalk mark was placed on the sidewalk of the house. Frank's crew arrived about 30 minutes later—allowing time to wash and dress the child—to take the picture(s). Several days later they returned with proofs and took orders. Sometimes Frank rented a local theater and showed films to create an interest. He called his company the Novelty Photo & Amusement Co., bought a Little Giant truck in which to store his equipment, develop the photos, and conduct his business, and kept a diary of his travels.



Frank, and later his son Lowell, took a wide variety of pictures, including family members, family houses, family farms and equipment, and cars. The hundreds of black and white pictures in both books are of professional quality and are reproduced in large format on coated paper, making them an invaluable source for study to see how people lived and did things in the early 1900s. For example, there is a series of six Christmas photos taken each year between 1919 and 1924 showing the same corner of the Nissley house in Lemoyne but with different tree decorations and toys—and children—under the tree. There is a picture of the family harvesting potatoes in Lionville in 1926, and both books have numerous photographs and reproductions of early advertisements for large, vintage touring cars—Packards, Maxwells, Pullmans, etc. The loose glossy fold-out cover of the 1998 book has an amazing 4 x 27 inch photograph [ca.1908] of a threshing outfit on the Nissley Lancaster County farm. The rig consists of a train of five different pieces of large equipment followed by Lowell's uncle in a 1907 Studebaker.



On June 4, 1915 Frank and his truck headed west to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco celebrating the completion of the Panama Canal. He continued to keep his diary, taking pictures all along the way, and ended with his arrival at the fair on October 23, 1915. Lowell's 2006 book begins with this trip.

The first paved highway across the United States was the Lincoln Highway, completed in 1913. In this area it loosely followed the route of the original 62.5-mile 1795 Philadelphia-Lancaster Turnpike. This turnpike had a series of limestone mileposts along the way, many of which are now lost. But the 21st milepost repatriated at the August 8, 2008 ceremony had stood for a long time near the site of the Haldeman-Brackbill Market near the Malin Farm along Route 30 in East Whiteland Township.

Lowell Nissley married Miriam Brackbill on July 5, 1947. They were active in the Frazer Mennonite Church and gave a lifetime of Christian Service to the Eastern Mennonite Church, serving and living in several different states including Kansas, Indiana, and Florida. Many photographs of their Mennonite work are in the 2006 book. The original Malin farm was being sold and the milepost had to be saved. In 1968 Lowell and Miriam moved it to their home in Indiana in their station wagon and put it in their rock garden. Around 1975 the milepost was moved to a new Nissley house in Sarasota, FL where it served as a bench outside the front door. From Sarasota it came back in 2008 to its original site on the north side of Route 30 in East Whiteland Township.

Lowell had discovered the diaries his father kept as a photographer and in 2000 he and Miriam decided to retrace Frank's 1915 cross-country trip. These 1915 diary entries are included in the 2006 book as well as many of Frank's 1915 and Lowell's 2000 photographs of the same site in a sort of "then and now" fashion. Also included are many pictures of the 7-foot high concrete directional posts the Boy Scouts began to install coast-to-coast along the Lincoln Highway in September 1928. Many of these, too, have been lost, but Lowell tells of the one in Malvern "one mile south of Route 30 across from the Villa Maria Academy."

Joyce A. Post



Facing page and above: an early 20th century threshing rig, circa 1908. This panoramic photograph was taken by Frank Nissley at the Nissley family homestead near Millersville, Pa. The threshing equipment belonged to Lowell Nissley's uncle, who is seated in his 1907 Studebaker at the right of the rig.

Editor's Note: see the article on the following page for more information on early threshing machines.