

Photograph Analysis

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HIS 142

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There are four people pictured in my photograph. The oldest lady who is sitting in the chair is my great-great-great-great grandmother, Albertina Rehmus Schroeder. The woman standing behind her is my great-great-great grandmother, Louisa Schroeder Berthold. The man is my great-great grandfather, Edward Berthold. The baby is my great-grandmother, Virginia Adell Berthold Miller Milz. This picture was taken in the summer of 1918, either in July or August in Algohma, Wisconsin. Algohma is a small town located in the northwest part of Wisconsin. This picture shows four generations and is important to me because it features my great-grandmother, who I knew personally and was close to until she passed away three years ago. Even though the picture is almost one hundred years old, I still hold a personal connection to it and can say I knew one of the people featured.

I selected the *Chicago Tribune* as my newspaper to research. While the picture was taken in Wisconsin, my great-great grandfather and great-grandmother lived in Chicago. They were visiting family in Wisconsin when the photograph was taken. The *Chicago Tribune* covered not only Chicago news, but also national news. That was helpful with understanding a broad and narrow look at what was happening that year. I read issues from February 16-24, 1918. I selected these issues because they were the closest dates to the summer that I was able to gain access to. Since it was wartime in the U.S., most of the newspapers and every headline were related to World War One. The headlines read things like “Wilson Ends Ship Strike” and “German Fleet Hits Russia.” There was always a section with updates on the front lines and movement of troops across Europe. The war would have affected their lives, in the sense that there was a call to action for citizens to participate in helping the war effort and remaining loyal to their country. They also may have had extended family or friends fighting overseas that they were worried about. In addition, the advertisements demonstrated consumer trends and the changes that the

beginning of the century brought, especially with women's fashion and food products that would have directly affected my family members. Even though none of my family members in the picture fought in the war, they would have been affected by it. A majority of each newspaper issue was dedicated to updates about fighting, possibilities of peace and negotiations, casualties, found soldiers, stories, and pictures of the troops. The whole country was called to action. There were several advertisements for war bonds. In class, we discussed the need to rally Americans for the war effort, and many of these articles displayed that urgency.

One article that stuck out to me was entitled "We Must Grow More Wheat"¹. The article explained that the Chicago area was running low on wheat. Civilians were not the only people affected; wheat was needed for shipment to troops abroad. This article encouraged citizens to reduced wheat use in their homes in order to ensure that there was enough for soldiers abroad. Three days later, an article entitled "Chicago Faces Wheat Famine Within a Week" was published². This article stated that wheat was in extremely short supply, and should not be used by civilians as all of it was needed to send to allied troops overseas. This would have affected my family members, as they probably used wheat to bake bread. This is a great example of how the war trickled down to affect simple aspects of their everyday lives.

Along with the theme of food, there were many ads about food products in the *Chicago Tribune*. I saw a few ads for Carnation and Libby's evaporated milk. Evaporated milk is normally used to bake, and with the normalcy of ovens in homes at this time, baking was popular. The ads resonated with me because we still have these brands today and I use them when I bake with my mom, something my ancestors would have done as well. I saw an

¹ "We Must Grow More Wheat," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), February 17, 1918.

² "Chicago Faces Wheat Famine Within a Week," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), February 20, 1918.

advertisement for cocoa that targeted children. It suggested adding cocoa powder to milk so children would like it better. So close to the roaring twenties, cocoa can be viewed as a luxury and an example of freedom of consumption. More variety was in the food market, as the American palate was expanding. Another advertisement was for a substance called “Sa-van-eg”, a substitute for eggs “made of pure milk and selected cereal products”³. It was advertised as “wholesome and nourishing.” The article stated that it was sold out in many stores, so it must have been popular at the time. These food advertisements demonstrate the changing American palate, cooking habits, and consumer trends. They all emphasized their affordability and health benefits as well.

While food advertisements were prevalent in the newspapers, there were numerous ads for clothing and beauty products, especially for women. Dresses were shown the most. Different silhouettes were promoted, beginning to trend more towards shift dresses⁴. I noticed that this style resembled a typical flapper look, since the next decade created a new look for women, especially young women. My great-grandmother and her mother would have been influenced by the changing fashion, as Virginia grew up during the changing fashions of the twenties, and my great-great grandmother, Adell, was in her twenties and thirties at that time. Marshall Fields, a Chicago department store that only was bought out ten years ago, had many advertisements in the newspaper. Virginia used to tell stories about shopping in Marshall Fields, and the high quality service she received, such as workers taking her coat and bringing her water. The February 17th issue of the *Chicago Tribune* also printed an ad for women’s skin cream,

³ “Sa-van-eg,” *Chicago* (Chicago, IL), February, 1918.

⁴ “Dress Advertisements,” *Chicago* (Chicago, IL), February, 1918.

something that would have been viewed as a luxury during this period⁵. While my family was not very wealthy, they may have been able to afford some of these luxuries.

The changing qualities for women went past just looks. I found two articles that discussed women's roles in the war. One piece was titled "Women and War"⁶. Women were discussed as having more involvement in industrial labor. The author, Rollin Lynde Hartt, wrote that this was brought on by the need for more workers during the war, but he thought that the trend would continue on in post war years. While he was criticizing that women were breaking out of their traditional stereotypes, he realized that this is what the future held. A second article in the same issue discussed women fundraising for the war, specifically college women and new alumni from women's colleges and some of the large state universities in the Midwest. The contrast between the two articles demonstrated the changing times that the war brought and that the coming decade would bring. While some women were staying on the sidelines and just raising money, others were jumping in feet first to physically help the war effort. Women were beginning to break out of their stereotypes and define their own lives. My family members were at the prime age for these changes, as they were growing up as teenagers and young women.

When I first saw the photograph, I did not think about the historical context of the time. After reading through the different issues of the *Chicago Tribune*, I realized how much important history my ancestors experienced. World War One had an impact on their lives, from the constant flow of updates about troops and battles, to the calls to action for civilian participation. The shift to in-home cooking and baking would have influenced their eating habits and diet. In addition, the changing trends of female stereotypes and occupations paved the road for the women in my family to have more freedom and choice in their lives. Overall, I have a greater

⁵ "Skin Cream Ad," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), February 17, 1918.

⁶ Rollin Lynde Hartt, "Women in War," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), February 17, 1918.

appreciation for my ancestors, especially the women, as they had to experience difficult and trying parts of history. My great-grandmother, Virginia, was born into a nation where she could not vote as a woman. Over her lifetime, society changed and by the end of her life, women had immense possibilities and had overcome so much oppression that I will thankfully never have to experience. I respect my ancestors even more than I already did, because their lives were much harder than mine and had to live through difficult parts of history. Yet they persevered and showed how important family is in dark and trying times.

Works Cited

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