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### THE FIRST NINETY YEARS

It was June 2, 1952. The last strains of the organ march by Grieg died away. Faculty and degree candidates at the University of Wyoming in Laramie seated themselves in the front of the huge, recently opened Memorial Fieldhouse. Together with other members of the large Commencement audience, they faced a flower-lined stage crowded with dignitaries. Following the invocation, Governor Barrett spoke a few words of greeting.

As President Humphrey rose to announce the title of the Commencement address -- "Green Lights for Freedom" -- and introduce the speaker -- John S. Bugas, an alumnus -- many eyes focused on this young Wyoming man who had risen to the position of vice-president in charge of industrial relations at the Ford Motor Company in Detroit. Others in the audience centered their attention on the faces of the two persons who, later in the morning, would be awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws.

One of these two honorary candidates was an unassuming little brown-eyed woman, ninety years of age. Those brown

eyes, sparkling with the excitement of it all, looked out over the big audience as a little smile hovered around her lips.

How satisfying it was to know that the members of her own closely knit little family had come from near and far to witness the tribute to be paid her by the state of her adoption! Out there, in front of the stage, sat sons Ben and Fulton; daughters-in-law Beth and Wilhelmina; grandson John and his wife Josephine; even eleven-year-old great-grandson, John Cary Bellamy II.

Unfortunately, her hearing was no longer what it once had been. She leaned forward eagerly, trying to catch the speaker's words. It was of no use! His back was turned and the microphone he faced threw his voice out toward the audience, away from the people who sat on the stage. She settled back in her chair and resigned herself to turning her thoughts inward.

A few years ago she had seen a flashback moving picture at the old Empress Theatre, now the Fox Theatre, in downtown Laramie. Each picture flashed upon that screen had fallen into place in its natural chronological order and had been preceded by the slow merging and gradual fading of the date of the year which had heralded it.

Just now, with time on her hands, and unable to hear the voice at the podium, she would sit quietly and reflect on the "flashback movie" of her own life.

1861. It had begun on Friday, December 13. Yes, Friday the 13th! Luckily, her parents were not particularly superstitious! Otherwise, they might have feared for the life of the baby -- with brown eyes and brown hair, inclined to curl -- who appeared that day in their little home at Richwood, Missouri. She was born not only on Friday the 13th, but also in the midst of a Civil War which was sure to leave its mark on the whole nation for many decades to come.

Doubtless her parents did wonder what was in store for her. For little Marie Godat, christened "Marie", nicknamed "Mollie", later to be known in public life as "Mary G. Bellamy".

Although Mollie's mother was American born, she sometimes had mentioned with pride that her father was once the mayor of Bern, Switzerland. Mollie's father also had come directly to this country from Switzerland where he was descended from a long line of French Huguenots.

1868. Little Mollie was the youngest of seven girls. One brother had died before she was born. With the neighborhood children, she attended school and played some of the games children still like to play today -- "Anthony Over," "Drop the Handkerchief" and "London Bridge Is Falling Down."

Following Mr. Godat's death, Mollie accompanied her widowed mother on a visit to the home of Estelle, a married sister in Galena, Illinois. They decided to make their own home in that little town and Mrs. Godat was pleased with the schooling her daughter acquired there.

1873. Mollie was twelve years old when another sister, Alice, died suddenly in far-off Wyoming Territory. Alice's husband, J. L. Murphey, sent an urgent appeal to Mrs. Godat in Illinois to come west and make her home with him and his orphaned two-year-old son, Louis.

Never would Mollie forget that train ride! Four days it had taken them to travel from Galena to Laramie, Wyoming.

This little western town of Laramie had sprung up five years before as "end-o'-track" on the Union Pacific, the country's first transcontinental railway. At birth, Laramie had consisted of canvas tents and board shacks, put together hastily from any materials available. The use of discarded railroad ties and dismantled wagon boxes caused some of the shacks to assume a "Mrs.-Wiggs-of-the-Cabbage-Patch" appearance. The town was still crude and rough and boisterous in 1873 but the lawless element which always followed the building of a railroad had moved on westward to Carbon (soon a ghost town); to Fort Steele (now just a memory); and to Rawlins (still, in 1952, a fine, thriving community.)

Laramie people back in 1873 had bought their drinking water at twenty-five to thirty cents a barrel from men who brought it directly from the Laramie River, just west of town. For cooking purposes, some families sank barrels of their own in ditches beside the unpaved streets and got the water they needed.

Mollie adjusted quickly to this strange, new western town. She made many friends among the children and the grownups. She joined the school group which later made up the first class to graduate from Laramie High School. There were only two members of that class besides Mollie Godat -- Maggie Carroll and Cora Pearson. Maggie was living today with a son and daughter in Salt Lake City. Cora had died many years ago.

1876. Ah, that was the year the United States held its Centennial celebration! The West, as well as the East, participated. Fort Sanders, two miles south of Laramie, boasted of the Army reports which declared the Sanders band held the second highest rating in the whole nation. There were many band concerts in Laramie in those days, but the one which marked the Centennial celebration was one which the town's citizens never forgot!

1878. Again Mollie traveled westward but this time she went alone. As a brand-new western schoolma'am, she journeyed

to the neighboring state of Nevada where Eliza Page, a third sister, lived. For three years she made her home with Eliza at Tybo in Nye County and taught the children of that neighborhood.

1881. Back in Wyoming Territory once more, she traveled upstate to teach in a rural community twenty miles from Buffalo. While living with the John R. Smith family there, it had been fun to stake out a homestead claim on land nearby. Actually she never "proved up" on the claim since she returned to Laramie when she was notified of a school vacancy at home. Just last year, however -- in 1951, seventy years later -- a member of the Smith family had told her (while visiting in Laramie) that bit of homestead acreage was still known in the old community as "the Mollie Godat land."

1882. Mollie began her Laramie teaching career in the old West Side School across the railroad tracks. Actually, at first, she was just a helper for Mrs. Belle Whiting, whose group, known as the "Third Primary Department," numbered far more pupils than any one teacher could possibly handle. The salary of eight dollars a month which the school board first paid Mollie did not seem very munificent, even in 1882. Later, she was assigned a grade of her own in the northwest corner of the East Side School, built in

1879. Today, in 1952, that old East Side building still formed the heart of the modern, block-square Laramie High School building. Of course, not many of the townspeople living now realized that fact.

Those teaching days in the 1880's and 1890's were happy ones. Perhaps, in the Commencement audience out front, were some of those very same pupils she had taught long ago. Several of them still made their homes in Laramie. Among them were Bert Miller (retired banker); Fred Frick (retired postal clerk); Martha Wallis (who still occupied her parental home on South Eighth street, a stone's throw from the old school); and Maud May (from the old May ranch near Centennial), who became the wife of George Stevens. Some of her former pupils who lived elsewhere today still wrote occasional cards, or dropped by to see her, or even sent flowers when they were in town. A teacher's life was such a full life, its compensations not limited by the meager pay check, but reaching out, (in her case) to span a period of 70 years.

1886. It was in the midst of a full teaching year that she had married Charles Bellamy, a civil engineer from Boston, Massachusetts, who had loved the West as she did. He had also loved her name, "Marie," She was no longer "Mollie" now, even in her own thoughts. It was Charles who had

named that sparkling blue lake in the Snowy Range of the Wyoming Rockies west of Laramie for her. "Lake Marie," it was called! Today a modern sign at the edge of the lake proclaimed its name and it appeared also on local maps of the region.

Charles' work in civil engineering carried him far away from Laramie at times but he always came back to the hometown of their choice.

1887. Marie continued to teach at the old East Side School even after little Ben was born. When he was about five years of age, the Bellamy family moved to Cheyenne where Charles became secretary to General Thompson in the Territorial land office.

1895. They were still living in Cheyenne when the twins, Fulton and Freeman, were born. Freeman was not very robust and he died at the age of eight months but Fulton, like Ben, lived to make their little home a happy one.

1896. That was the year she became a charter member of the Cheyenne Woman's Club and threw herself wholeheartedly into its activities. She had always enjoyed work outside as well as inside the home.



1898. Back in Laramie once more, she was one of the chief organizers of the Woman's Club in that town. Now, fifty-four years later, she was still a faithful member.

1902. Teaching was in her blood! No longer a classroom worker, she still yearned for it. Her friends urged her to run for the office of Albany County Superintendent of Schools. She did, and she won! Her theme for the children of that county was "KNOW WYOMING!" Again and again, she urged their teachers to acquaint them more fully with the rich geographical and historical background which was theirs. Constantly also, she advocated greater equalization of tax money among the various districts.

1904. What a happy privilege it was to serve as one of the founders of the Wyoming State Federation of Woman's Clubs! The groups were growing throughout the nation and it was a fine thing to witness the increased interest of women in civic betterment.

1905. She and Charles made several eastern visits to the home of his Boston relatives. Occasionally they took Ben or Fulton with them. How well she remembered meeting Julia Ward Howe, ardent suffragette and composer of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic!"

Both as a territory in 1869 and as a state in 1890, Wyoming men had made woman suffrage possible. By 1905, voting was a commonplace event for women from the "Equality State." Marie was therefore somewhat amused at a Boston tea party when Mrs. Howe requested that they sit together so that she could "talk with a woman who actually had voted."

1910. Five years later, Marie was more than a voting citizen. Her good neighbors of Albany County sent her to Cheyenne as the first Wyoming woman to serve as a state legislator. She became chairman of the credentials committee and a member of the committees on public buildings, education and libraries. As her goal, she set up the betterment of conditions for the women and children of the state. She was instrumental in establishing the Boys' Industrial School at Worland so lads of tender age need no longer be housed with hardened criminals. She felt that women, also, should have separate penal quarters so she persuaded her fellow legislators to arrange for them to be segregated from the men and sent to a neighboring state prison where they could be housed more efficiently. She helped formulate laws which would result in the handling of better foods by Wyoming merchants.

At that time, even in the "Equality State," a widow was not permitted to become the administrator of her husband's

estate. One bill Marie had helped introduce provided for this to happen.

She felt very strongly that all of the state institutions of higher learning should be housed on a single campus so she gave freely of her time in helping to bring the College of Agriculture to Laramie. The Home Economics department was added to the State University partly through her efforts.

Those two years at the statehouse in Cheyenne were busy, strenuous years but certainly they had borne fruit!

1912. That was the year Ben married Beth Cary. Beth (Nebraska and Iowa bred) had come to Wyoming when her father assumed supervision of some of the bridge construction work along the Union Pacific railway. Ben had received his B. S. degree in Civil Engineering at the State University in 1910 and Beth was granted a normal diploma in Education in June of the year they were married.

1915. Again an eventful year! Marie (or "Mary G. Bellamy" as she was called in public life) was a delegate both to the state and the national Democratic conventions. She served also as a member of the national committee which notified President Woodrow Wilson of his second nomination.

Of far greater significance in the life of the Bellamy family was the birth of the one and only grandchild -- Ben and Beth's boy, John Cary Bellamy -- on April 18, 1915.

1917. Fulton entered the 148th division of field artillery as a lieutenant and served overseas during World War I for several months. Ben's name, which had been lost in the records of the army office, was not located until about the close of the great conflict.

1918. Mary G. Bellamy was sent by the women of Wyoming to the great national suffrage convention in Washington, D. C. Here she met again Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt who had won her admiration years before as an ardent advocate of women's rights.

1920. Two events stood out in her memory of that year. Beth, who had continued her college work along with her duties as a wife and mother, received her bachelor's degree in Education that June.

Of great national significance that year was the 19th amendment to the Federal constitution, granting woman suffrage. It was ratified by 3/4 of the states on August 26. A wonderful victory, indeed! Mary G. Bellamy was proud to have played a small part in the campaign which led to the adoption of that amendment.

1921. How proud she was in the June following passage of the suffrage act, when her friend, Carrie Chapman Catt, became the first woman to receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from the University of Wyoming! Little did she dream then that 31 years later a similar honor would be paid to her, Mary Godat Bellamy! She could scarcely believe it yet.

1929. Ben, Beth and teen-age John left Laramie for an eastern sojourn which lasted five years. On the eastern coast, Ben served the city of New York as an engineer. His work centered around the development of vehicular tunnels and water supply, and the construction of city hospitals. John was one of 5,000 pupils at Stuyvesant High School where he graduated with a number of awards, including the gold medal of honor.

1934. Sorrow entered the Laramie home at 315 South Tenth street in the summer of 1934. Charles' death came as a distinct shock following an illness of short duration. Even yet, it seemed impossible that he was gone.

1935. After her husband's death, Mary threw herself into the work of the various local organizations to which she belonged. Chief among them were the Ladies Aid of the Presbyterian church, the Woman's Club, the American Legion Auxiliary and the Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

How pleased she was when the local Woman's Club undertook the big problem of establishing and maintaining a county historical museum! They used "the Mary G. Bellamy Collection" as part of the nucleus for that museum.

That year of 1935 also marked Fulton's marriage to Wilhelmina ("Billie") Pecheau of Montrose, Colorado. They had met in Cheyenne where she was teaching and he was working in the state engineer's office.

1936. Young John graduated with a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering at the University of Wyoming about the same time Ben, his father, was appointed to one of the chief engineering jobs on the Shoshone federal irrigation project upstate near Cody.

1938. Following his attainment of a master's degree in Physics at the University of Wisconsin, John became deeply interested in individual experimentation. His decision to leave an assistantship at Madison and come home to engage in "atom-busting" research pleased his grandmother very much. Except at mealtime, she saw very little of him but, just the same, it was comforting to know he was there. He spent from eight to ten hours daily in the family garage which served as his laboratory and he studied nuclear reactions from four to five hours at night. "Atom-buster Bellamy," they called him!

1940. Of course she was still interested in Ben's engineering activities and in Fulton's duties with the Civil Aeronautics Administration but somehow, since Charles' death and her own retirement from really active civic work, so much of her life seemed to center around John. His wedding to Josephine Johnston of Sinclair, Wyoming, occurred in September, 1940. She saw less of him after that because the young couple moved forty miles north of Rawlins where John took over a surveying job at the Ferris oil field.

1942. Just as it had been hard to watch Fulton march off to war back in 1917, it saddened her to say good-bye to John in 1942. He served in the Pacific as a special consultant to the Army Air Force and later became director, for a time, of the Institute of Meteorology at the University of Puerto Rico.

1946. Soon after the close of World War II, John received a Ph.D. in Meteorology at the University of Chicago. Since that time he had been employed as assistant director of the Cook Electrical Research Company in Chicago. Both Fulton and his wife, Billie, held degrees from the University of Wyoming by this time, he in Engineering and she in Education.

1948. In HARPERS MAGAZINE for May, Wolfgang Langewiesche -- test pilot and writer on aviation affairs -- paid a special

tribute to John's wartime discovery of the way to measure barometric pressure while flying from continent to continent. According to Langewiesche, "that little trick helped more to make an airplane oceanworthy than another couple of engines would help, or another ton of gasoline."

Two honors came that year to John's grandmother also. The Casper, Wyoming, Kiwanis Club presented her with an award for outstanding achievements and the Wyoming Press Women voted her an honorary membership.

1951. Still another honor came her way when the state chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (in which she held a local honorary membership) presented her name as the one to represent Wyoming on the inscriptions placed in the Memorial Bell Tower, newly erected by the national organization at Valley Forge.

1952. And now it was 1952! What was that old saying -- "the first hundred years were the hardest?" One thing she could say in all sincerity -- her "first ninety years" had been full and satisfying! God had been good, indeed! How rich she was in friends, for instance! Dozens of them had helped to make this final great honor possible for her. How grateful she was to all of them, particularly to her two very good friends, Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Fey!



Her eyes sought also the place in the audience where the Bellamy family sat together as a unit. At breakfast that morning, they had decided that the long Commencement activities would be too tiring for John and Jo's three youngest children so they were left at home. Eleven-year-old John II, however, was sitting out there in the audience with a rapt expression on his face as he watched the nearly 450 degree candidates march across the stage to receive their diplomas. What was he thinking? His own father, mother, grandparents, great-uncle and great-aunt had attended the University of Wyoming. In just a few moments, he would watch this same institution confer an honorary degree upon his great-grandmother.

In a few moments? Mercy! Already the Commencement marshal, (her good neighbor and friend, Dr. Sam Knight, head of the University department of geology) was approaching to escort her to the president's station. Dr. T. A. Larson, head of the history department, was beginning to read her citation:

"Mary Godat Bellamy, exemplary woman, wife and mother; pioneer educator, legislator and civic leader . . . "

Yes, certainly her "first ninety years" had been well worth living!

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