

GENIEVE LAMSON

1886 - 1966

In the year 1887, the Constitution of the United States had been in operation for less than a century. Only forty States comprised the Union. Grover Cleveland was President and Morrison Waite was Chief Justice. David B. Hill was Governor of New York and in his annual message to the Legislature he recommended "the abolition of an unnecessary office."

Abroad, Victoria was Queen and the Marquis of Salisbury was her prime minister. William I was Emperor of Germany and Alexander III, Tsar of Russia.

Only twenty-nine years earlier, Charles Darwin had published his Origin of Species. Karl Marx had been dead but four years. And in 1887, that supreme revolutionary, Gottlieb Daimler, was operating for the first time a motor car propelled by a petrol engine.

In this same year, in the cool silence of a little Vermont town, in sight of the Braintree Mountains and close by the gentle waters of the Third Branch of the White River, Genieve Lamson was born.

Miss Lamson's ancestors settled in Randolph in 1791. They were farmers; and good, solid middleclass citizens; hardy, self-reliant, independent, and God-fearing. One uncle ran the farm, another became a highly successful hardware merchant. Her father purchased and operated a retail furniture store. As was customary in those days, he was also the local undertaker and funeral director.

Before 1900, Miss Lamson's father invested money in gold mining which turned out to be worthless; so that while he was able to send his oldest child and only son to college, he could not afford to do the same for his three daughters.

Armed only with a high-school diploma, Miss Lamson taught for four terms in the rural schools around Randolph.

On a Sunday afternoon she would drive her horse and sleigh some miles out to a tiny village where for five days a week she met her charges in a one-room schoolhouse; tended a pot-bellied stove; and gave instruction, not only in reading, writing, and arithmetic, but, by way of McGuffey, in the virtues of temperance, industry, self-control, stick-to-itiveness, mercy, and honesty.

GENIEVE LAMON - continued

The following Friday afternoon would see her return to Randolph. During the week she would live with a local family.

Miss Lamson spoke occasionally of those drives through deep snows, of the biting winds that carried the flakes against her face, of the crunch of steel runners upon hard-packed snow. Finding that she liked teaching, Miss Lamson attended a normal school in Springfield, Massachusetts, for one year. Then for five years she taught in the Roselle Park, New Jersey, high

school.

Aware of the need for a college education, Miss Lamson ventured even deeper into that great area west of the Hudson River and matriculated at the young University of Chicago. Here, she received her Bachelor of Science degree in 1920 at the age of thirty-three.

After a year of teaching in a private school, Miss Lamson returned to Chicago for a Master's degree.

In 1922, she came to Vassar where she remained until her retirement thirty years later.

Miss Lamson was an economic geographer. She was at first associated with the Department of Geology. In 1934 a Department of Geography was established and Miss Lamson was installed as chairman. This position she held throughout her tenure. Her published works include "Geographic influences in the Early History of Vermont" (1924), "A Study of Agricultural Populations in Selected Vermont Towns" (1931), and parts here and there in the Dutchess County Works Progress Administration Guide Book of which project she was the director. Miss Lamson was a delegate to the International Geographical Union Congress in Warsaw, Poland, in 1934, and in Amsterdam, Holland, in 1938.

For twenty years, she was head resident in Lathrop House.

Miss Lanson also distinguished herself as Editor-in-chief of the Vassar Journal of Undergraduate Studies.

Miss Lamson in her "Study of Agricultural Populations in selected Vermont Towns" described the Vermont farmer, and in doing so, described herself. He is, she wrote, "a person of reserve and a strong sense of privacy. His characteristic independence is based upon an inherent self-respect. He asks

GERIIVE LAMBO – continued
no 'odds of society.' He will deal generously with the unfortunate, and dispense hospitality to the stranger, with no apologies for the conditions of his hospitality. At the same time he will drive a shrewd bargain and is so thrifty that he has earned the reputation of being 'close.' A profound conservative, the farmer clings to the established order. He accepts change cautiously, and only from conviction based on experience. His conservatism," she continued, "expresses itself in his code of morals and religion. There is a good deal of the English Puritan in the Vermont farmer. He has a keen sense of right and wrong, and a straightforward honesty. He respects education. He appreciates initiative and ability. He has a profound sense of community responsibility."

One thing she did not mention. In every Vermonter, buried deep within his soul, is the spirit of Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain boys. This spirit manifested itself in Miss Lamson when she rebelled against the Republicanism of her forefathers, against the Republicanism of her immediate family, of her relations to the farthest remove, and of her friends.

She flirted with socialism in the images of Eugene V. Debs and Norman Thomas, and came to rest, finally, in the arms of Franklin D. Roosevelt—figuratively speaking.

When Miss Lamson retired she returned to the family home in Randolph which in spirit she had never left. She plunged immediately into the affairs of the community. She was the historian of the Bethany Congregational Church, a trustee of the Vermont Historical Society, a sponsor of the Vermont Symphony Orchestra, and a prominent member of the Randolph Garden Club. Almost to the time of her death she sang in the church choir.

Last May at the State meeting of the Vermont Division of the American Association of University Women, Miss Lamson was honored by having a national scholarship named for her.

Thus, on September 25th, there came to an end a useful life which covered monumental changes in the story of man. True to her background, Miss Lamson represented the best of traditions; but she had learned a lesson from Lincoln:

The dogmas of the quiet past are
inadequate to the stormy present

. . . As our case is new, so we
must think anew and act anew.

Ruth Conklin

Homer Pearson

Scott Warthin

Gordon Post, Chairman