

# Liberty and Progress

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A Dutch-American Biography of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

by  
Theo E. Korthals Altes  
The Hague, The Netherlands

©2012 Theo E. Korthals Altes, The Hague ([theokaltes@hotmail.com](mailto:theokaltes@hotmail.com))

Cover photo:

Carolyn Kellogg Hull, August 1913, Pittsfield, MA

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*"Do you believe in Jesus Christ?"*

*"Jesus Christ? He was the one who was resurrected  
before he finally went to heaven?  
No, I don't believe that.  
That is just a story."*

And the other children present answered:  
*"I believe what Carolyn said."*

One Sunday school, preparing for the creed  
Pittsfield, Massachusetts  
1898



## Preface



*Queen Victoria & European descendants*

I have a coffee table book which once belonged to my grandmother. Most likely it was given to her as a present by a member of the family or a friend, some time near the end of her life. The book, published in the United States in 1981, contains a photo album of the royal families of Europe between 1890 and 1914, titled "The Last Courts of Europe". No other surviving item of her book collection can demonstrate in more symbolic terms the great distance in time, space, and context through which my grandmother had traveled in her nearly ninety-five years. The pictures, scenes of royal privacy and official occasions, are not very happy ones. They portray men and women, young and old, propped up in most uncomfortable dresses, suits or costumes. They gaze to the camera like actors in a grand theater, uncertain of their role or of the next line to say. They were obviously ignorant – and largely innocent - of their approaching oblivion by the forces of revolution, war and assassination. My grandmother was as strange to them as we are, first of all because she was an American. But I am sure she felt sorry for them too when she flipped through the pages,

not just because of their eventual fate, but because of what they were supposed to be when they stood in front of the camera. The kings, queens, princes and dukes were a living anachronism already in their own days. The only one laughing and self-assured in the entire album is the man credited, rightly or wrongly, for the demise that followed. In the album Wilhelm II of Hohenzollern, German Kaiser, is shown as a man of childish pride, who so much desired to be counted as a man commanding an empire like his uncle Edward and then his cousin George of England.

When I look at the album today, the pictures seem a testimony to the loss of an entire species; not of leaders of history but rather of its victims. The pictures do not call for nostalgia in any way. The stifled world of military pomp and feathered hats and of a daily life that was staged by protocol in every detail indeed looks like a prison of which the seeming luxury only adds to its sadness in our present day eyes. Many will see it as a good thing that this particular epoch has passed. No doubt, so did my grandmother.

By the end of her life my grandmother had many other books, of course, including more scholarly ones, which reminded her of both the early and later years of her life time. She took an active interest in them. When trying to grasp the world in which her and my grandfather's generation grew up, I first of all read these various books rather than any later publications or studies.<sup>1</sup> I also realized that this period – the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> – were a remarkable era by all accounts. Much still depended on one's station in life and on the comfort in which people lived – or on the comfort that people miserably lacked. The distance between the circles of the elite, including the royals, and the common people was, of course, massive. But so was their general outlook on the world.

The ambition of my grandparents' generation, of the segment to which they belonged, was to make work, in practical and rational terms, of a consistent, organized and well engineered improvement of our society in every sphere, and to do so in a spirit of personal liberty and natural generosity. What they did, in essence, was to help lay the foundation of our present-day prosperity, of its underlying material

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<sup>1</sup> ) One of them is Barbara Tuchman's "The Proud Tower" - A portrait of the World before the War: 1890 - 1914 (first published in 1966)



improvements – in technology, industry and commercial organization – and of its basic human dignity.

As we are moving further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century we may find ourselves already some steps at a distance of the project of this generation. Our world in the mean time has progressed greatly beyond their scope, not merely in its technology and its wide ranging impact on our societies and their global alliances, but also in the essence of the western world. One could therefore say that it is both increasingly important and increasingly possible – as history moves on – to secure their memory and to retain its access for the benefit of present and future generations.

It should be well understood, however, that this story is just a modest contribution in this respect. It largely offers a reflection of private recollections in, hopefully, a meaningful way, that is: in the broader context of their era, the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. My aim has been to capture these recollections in the spirit and in the perspective by which they have been passed on. Of course, it is virtually impossible to do so without any regard to our present-day know-ledge and perspective. I have been well aware of this all through this effort. We do not always see or appreciate every charm or every – relative - disadvantage of our own time and often we only become aware of them as our world progresses. Similarly, we may find certain aspects of the past more pertinent than perhaps contemporaries have found them themselves, whether they relate to the greater changes in our world or to the peculiarities of the private lives of citizens. But this is why any exercise of history is very subjective and equally colored by the actual facts of the history we wish to tell and by the view we take in doing so. Especially my grandmother lived long enough to review her life time in her own mind and in her own words. Therefore I can say with considerable comfort that this book indeed offers a truthful reflection of her perspective to the greatest possible extent.

Still, it is my own evaluation of my grandparents' life and life time that has driven me to lay claim on their memory and to its pertinence among the footnotes of history. Of themselves the main events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century offer an awe inspiring tale, both for their contribution to human progress and for the magnitude of their horrors. In both dimensions humanity never saw more dramatic precedents. This is equally true for the personalities who carried them, on all accounts:

those who saved our world from peril and brought us to the Moon and those who set out to destroy our civilization and subject humanity to mass serfdom. Greatness arrives when it is most needed. How else could people like Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt have ascended their Olympus?

The private lives of citizens do not normally transcend their relevance in the small communities in which they pass from birth to death. But neither do they merely linger anonymously in the darkness of history's cellars. In their modest proportions we can see the reflections of this tide of greatness and peril too. In them we can equally observe all these greater and smaller efforts to bring us the modern world we know today, with every battle, every sacrifice and unprecedented human suffering that had to be overcome along the way – and we can see their intimate contributions in a brightly shining light.

Theo Korthals Altes  
Spring, 2012

## Acknowledgments

Most of all I wish to express my gratitude for the encouragement by members of the family both in Holland and in the US to complete this exercise. I am confident that in its final format it serves to preserve some of our shared precious memories not merely of two remarkable individuals, our grandparents, but more broadly: of the momentous decades in which they spent their lives. No doubt they would themselves have been slightly bemused about the accolades of their lifetime as presented in this book, but then it is a good thing that history is the prerogative of those who at some later time have the freedom to articulate their own interpretation of a particular epoch.

Also I am grateful for the encouragement and useful advice provided by professor James Kennedy and Dr. Paul Knevel of the University of Amsterdam. Similarly I wish to thank Dr. Hans Krabbendam of the Roosevelt Study Center in Middelburg for his assistance in providing some useful resources.

Finally, I was very happy to note that among the current generations of American women in Amsterdam, the memory of my grandmother is still very much alive and that her story is one in which there is a continued warm interest.



## A Youth in Paradise

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### One beautiful autumn

The Summer of 1891 in Pittsfield, Berkshire County, MA, had come to a close. Out in the hills and across the streets and gardens a blanket was drawn that transformed the deep green colors of the city's canopy into a glowing blaze of red and yellow. Berkshire County, also known as the Berkshires, covers the entire western stretch of Massachusetts, New England. To this day it is one of those places on Earth still visited annually by King Midas, when the crispy autumn sun shining through the rich foliage of the trees gives the landscape a golden glow and fills its inhabitants with their seasonal bliss of endless beauty and inner peace.

The coloring of the leaves in the Berkshires is not just a beautiful accident; it is an immediate function of their survival, of their continued ability to help the trees to flourish one season after the other, in ongoing succession. The coloring happens for a specific purpose. It serves as a defense mechanism to stop leaf-eating insects attacking them. The color red also helps plants photosynthesize more effectively in the autumn and colder climates. What comes out is a more vigorous, healthy plant in the following spring, with fewer insect larvae compared to those with more common, grayish-brown autumn leaves.

In the perspective of the human society the sustained beauty of the Berkshires can be seen as a metaphoric phenomenon. It makes a point about the way we live ourselves and about the conditions we create to

enhance the survival of our offspring, in natural co-habitation with our environment. And this very much underscores the outlook of the inhabitants of Pittsfield in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The town was first established in the mid 1700s. Ever since, its community had taken care to preserve this enjoyment in the broad lay-out of their main streets and of their softly gliding avenues, sculpted through the countryside. In the 1800s the town had grown to become a major hub of the nation's woolen industry, catering for some 25% of the total US market. The community built its establishments, mills and manufactories, well outside the center, utilizing the power of the mountain streams, and thus preserving its inner tranquility.

Sustained prosperity and a conscious management of the natural habitat had made life in Pittsfield the lovingly guarded utopia of some fifteen thousand people, businessmen, craftsmen, store keepers, public officials, school teachers and their families, leaving them seemingly immune for the greater waves of change raging through the nation.

But it obviously couldn't remain unaffected by them. And it was exactly in 1891 that "this state of things began to be altered; and the change was violently contrary to the long experience of an especially self-contented community".<sup>2</sup> They were, however, not simply changes that fell upon the community as if it were suddenly bombarded by the brutal forces of a new emerging modern age. On the contrary. As much as the development of the city and its immediate environment thus far had been the outcome of the personal vision and drive of its leading businessmen, this new impetus to its development was largely a product of their energies too.

Moreover, whereas in the 1890s the community of Pittsfield experienced new change and substantive growth as a regional center of industry and commerce, this by and large brought an enhancement and not a disturbance in the key dimensions of its existence. "The residential portions of the city remained unvexed by the clang of machinery; the beauty of its surrounding uplands was not disturbed; and, with the exception, to the east, of the Hatter's Pond of former days, its jeweled lakes retained their rural loveliness. The city was therefore enabled still to share substantially in the growth of the

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<sup>2</sup> ) History of Pittsfield 1876 – 1916, Edward Boltwood jr. City of Pittsfield, 1916, page 78 e.a.

Berkshire's popularity as a summer resort. In Pittsfield, however, more often than in the other towns of the county, the casual visitor became the permanent resident, cultivated the city's increasing opportunities of business, and added to the enjoyment and value of its social life."<sup>3</sup>

Two major events in the year 1891 mark this development in the historic records of the city. First of all, after some twenty years of deliberation, the process of transforming Pittsfield from a township to incorporation as a city was finally concluded, "for it was vaguely believed by many good citizens in 1891, quite as it had been in 1871, that the possession of a more sounding title assured the possession of a more accelerated welfare." At the inauguration of the new City administration the virtues of Pittsfield's community were thus summarized: "We come then, as we have the right, recounting the glories and virtues of the town. In our homes are peace and plenty. In our midst have long dwelt religion and education. Here are thrift and industry and prosperity. Here are noble, beneficent institutions, well founded, well tried, doing good work. Here are cheer and friendliness and good manners. Here have been shown bright examples of patriotism, of loyalty, and of devotion to the welfare of man. Here, today, is a people proud of the past, but filled with high ambition for the future."

The second mayor event was the creation of a new industrial establishment, iconic for the encroaching modernity, dedicated to the manufacturing of electrical transformers. This would be the nucleus not only of Pittsfield's main industrial development in the forthcoming decades; it obviously had a crucial influence too on its population, both in size and configuration. The company, Stanley Works, was one of the forerunners of the present-day General Electric Company, in which it would be incorporated in the early 1900s. It attracted many innovative men, and their families, to the region. At the same time it re-enforced the stature and wider network in the world of industry and finance of the community's banking and insurance services. They had already established themselves in the preceding decades and had by that time, one may assume, matured to the degree that was necessary to attract and support a new and upcoming industry.

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<sup>3</sup> ) Boltwood, page 80

When at the turn of the season, on Sunday September 19, 1891, my grandmother Carolyn Kellogg Hull saw her first light of day, her father James Wells Hull was already a man in his middle-age. The next Monday he celebrated his 49<sup>th</sup> birthday. He stood at the height of his career. Some twenty years before he had come to Pittsfield, out of the neighboring North-East region of New York State, as a man of well noted numerical and administrative talent. He first worked at the Pittsfield National Bank and then joined Berkshire Life Insurance Company. Stern dedication and discipline had taken him from the position as secretary and subsequently as its treasurer to the position of vice-president. In Berkshire Life he met his future wife, Helen Plunkett. She was a daughter of the company's President, Thomas Fitzpatrick Plunkett, who had been a prominent Pittsfield financier, businessman and Massachusetts State politician. Plunkett, already in his seventies at that time, died just one year before they married. The company's presidency had then moved to a son-in-law, Edward Boltwood. Soon thereafter Boltwood died on a tour in Egypt, and the presidency was then transferred to Plunkett's son William Plunkett, thus again a brother-in law of James Hull. William Plunkett, as the company's records show, was a man very much living in the spirit of his father Thomas, "a strong advocate of charitable endeavors, supporting several causes and organizations." This civic generosity promoted by Plunkett "which became a tradition of Berkshire Life that continues to this day, was one sign of the company's unprecedented prosperity."<sup>4</sup> It would be continued by Carolyn's father when in turn he himself, in 1903, succeeded to the company's leading position.

Thus, throughout her childhood years, the young Carolyn was surrounded by adults in the prime of their lives; her parents, her surviving Plunkett grandmother, uncles and other relatives, who were people of considerable character and intellect. They stimulated an early maturity in her mental grasp not merely of the world outside. They more specifically fostered, consciously and unconsciously, her own sense of identity and the self-evidence in her own mind, both of the opportunities and of the responsibilities offered by the manifold advantages in which she grew up. Among these

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<sup>4</sup> ) Commemorative publication of Berkshire Life Insurance Company, 2001, at its hundred and fiftieth anniversary.



advantages, without question, were Carolyn's own character and intellect.

I have thus far pictured an almost idyllic late 19<sup>th</sup> century universe in which Carolyn came to life. However, I wish to emphasize that although it may exude an atmosphere of comfort and material prosperity, she was by no means bathed in mere privilege, by the hands of some ancient, landed gentry protecting its property and privileges against the roller coaster of innovation as it raged through the nation.

In Carolyn's childhood people were made well aware that discipline, duty and dedication preceded every comfort, but also that a person's responsibility in life always included his – or her – wider social responsibility. Nothing in her world was taken for granted. Carolyn experienced ample, living examples of this by virtue of her parents' conduct in their day to day affairs and in their contributions to the community of Pittsfield.

#### An environment of elevation

Carolyn was the Benjamin of the family. Two sisters and two brothers had preceded her. Her eldest sister Helen was fourteen at the time of her birth, and her youngest brother, Edward, had reached the age of seven. The house in which she was born was built in the corner of a large garden on Appleton Avenue, not far from Pittsfield's center. The family shared the compound with her maternal grandmother's household who lived with her three children and her four orphaned grandchildren. They lived like one big family. It follows that when Carolyn was old enough to understand the general rhythm and scope of her family's life and its wider setting, few if any childish enjoyments still prevailed in their house. Everybody around, her parents, her siblings and the Plunkett cousins, had serious occupations at school, at work or in the community. And however much she played and went out with her own friends in the neighborhood, this was another element in her childhood that contributed to her early self-assertion. In this same period she also absorbed the family

discussions at home. Invariably they were about the anecdotes of her family members and the pre-occupations of her father in the conduct of his daily business.

Among Carolyn's recollections, written in her later life, is a story which is most exemplary for the style and character of her father both as an individual and as a businessman.

"Near the end of the 19th century the fashion in women's clothes had skirts that were long and wide and sleeves that were like balloons. On a beautiful autumn day at that time a woman, wearing homemade but fashionable clothes, was walking along the main shopping street of Pittsfield when a new show window was being put in the store. The window slipped and fell, cutting off a large piece of the woman's right sleeve and the bottom of her skirt. When she screamed a man came out of the building, writing a note on a pad that he held in his hand. He said: "We are insured, so if you go to Mr. Hull in the insurance building he will take care of it. It is the last building before the corner."

My father was sitting at his desk, studying a long row of figures, when his secretary came in, looking distressed and leading a weeping woman who handed him the note. The great area of naked flesh made it easy for him to see that she did not have a scratch but had missed death by less than an inch. She must have been terrified and the tears were probably a healthy reaction. Just the same he felt that he must somehow stop them. He turned to his secretary and asked her if she would be willing to go out with the woman to a department store a little more than a block away, and see to it that everything the woman had on was replaced by a new garment selected by herself. He would call up the management of the store, so that they would be waiting for them when they got there. The secretary beamed and the tears stopped as if he had turned off a faucet. The two women left arm in arm.

It lasted a very long time before they came back and they both looked as if they had a hilarious good time. It seems that everybody in the store had enjoyed that sale too. The woman was wearing new shoes

and stockings, new underwear, a new skirt, a new waist, a new coat, a new hat, and even little side combs for a new hairdo.

The store had sent a complete list on which the woman had acknowledged the receipt of the goods and a bill for the insurance company to pay. The old clothes were neatly packed into a cardboard box. The woman danced around the room, showing the coat and skirt at every angle and finally left, saying: *"Oh, Mr. Hull, thank you for this wonderful day. It was just like a fairy story."*

Then there is the element of her personal identity and her sense of time and place in a wider context as it was gradually fed to her in accounts of her forebears' histories and, of course, of American history. In Carolyn's life and family background much of it in fact constituted one and the same epic tale. The history of the first settlers and of some of the most fundamental principles that had founded the nation ran through her blood. Some notable forebears had passed on their genes and spirit.

The first Hull to settle in Massachusetts was the Reverend Joseph Hull, who in 1635 had been thrown out of the English Church, only to find himself at great odds with the theocratic Puritan leaders of Massachusetts. This happened almost immediately after he and his so-called Hull Company of some hundred followers had landed on the shores of New England. Reverend Hull then passed from parish to parish and throughout his life found himself surrounded both by followers and those who opposed him. He repatriated to England but returned to the colonies soon thereafter, where he spent his last years as a minister at Accometicus (Maine), which included the Isles of Shoals. A few decades later, in 1699, one of his great-grandsons married a granddaughter of Massachusetts' most revered martyr for religious freedom, Mary Dyer, Quaker, who was publicly hanged in Boston in 1660. There was a woman who spoke up her mind in a world dictated by the whims of men!

Through further intermarriage the bloodlines were connected well back to the first New England settlers, known as the Pilgrim Fathers. When some time in the 1960s I found a plastic do-it-yourself model of the Mayflower, the ship by which in 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers had come out of Europe, I bought it, glued it together, and gave it to my grandmother, who kept it till her dying day.

And however modest she would remain of her own descent, it did instill the notion in her mind that history and the deeds of greater and lesser people alike were topics of inquiry and discussion for any reasonable and intelligent individual such as herself, without prejudice to status or stature. It would become one of Carolyn's greatest pleasures to conduct such inquiries and share these with anyone, at equal footing, both to enhance her own understanding and to relate this to those eager to learn from her. There have been many who tho-roughly enjoyed the occasions to do so in her company.

“My grandfather Charles Hull, who was born just before the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, could not afford to get married until he was nearly 30 and when he did he left his mother and the rest of the family in the old house and built another next door just like it but a little bigger. When his mother died the two sisters and two of the brothers had married and left the house so the youngest brother, my father's uncle John, moved into my grandfather's house and shared a loft with four nephews and the schoolteacher.

Now that his brothers were gone and his own sons were too little to do work on the farm my grandfather had to make use of the migrant laborers who came up from the south in the spring to help plow and plant and from the north in the fall to help with the harvest.

He quickly learned that each laborer expected to receive a bottle of rum on Saturday evening as a part of his wages. His own father's weakness had been rum as was the case with many American males near the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At that time a cheaper way of distilling liquor had been invented and the market was flooded with cheap rum from the West Indies. The effect of this on a population, whose strongest drink before that had been homemade cider, is easy to understand. Very many men got caught in a trap that they had never foreseen.

My grandfather told my father that it was a blessing that most women did not drink at all. Nobody helped the men. They were regarded as sinners to be scolded or punished. My grandfather could not regard his father as a sinner but rather as a victim.

What he had seen as a child had made him unwilling to drink at all for fear of being caught in the same trap. He knew he could not give rum to the men who worked for him without feeling like a murderer, so he told them that he would not give them rum but would give them the equivalent in money.”

The character and influence of Carolyn’s maternal grandmother Harriette Plunkett are a case in point about the privilege in a young person’s life of a role model who, by whatever act of fate, perfectly matches one’s own potential. This most certainly was true for Carolyn and her Plunkett grandmother. It is said that actually they very much resembled each other in a good many respects: in stature, voice, intellect and personal drive.

Harriette Hodge Plunkett was a daughter of a long line of New England settlers. Her distant ancestors had survived one the greatest adversities in the early colonial days, known in history as “King Philip’s War” (1675 – 1676). King Philip had been the nickname of the Indian leader Metacomet who raided colonial settlements in a series of fierce confrontations. This included the massacre of much of the population of Hadley, MA, which was where the Hodge family had come from.

As a young woman Harriette worked as a schoolteacher and she became the second wife of Thomas Plunkett, some twenty years her senior. In one of her later recollections Carolyn wrote: “When they got engaged she got a letter from her mother, saying that she had heard that Harriette was marrying a rich old man for his money. She must break the engagement at once and marry an other man who was in love with her. Harriette answered that she was marrying Mr. Plunkett because he was a real man and not a Miss Nancy like all the men her mother had wanted her to marry.”

The marriage had been a most happy one. Harriette made it a priority to honor and support her husband first of all, including the raising of their children. Secondly, over time and well into old age, she took up her own causes. One such cause was the establishment of the Pittsfield House of Mercy, a hospital of which she was the President for some thirty years. “When the project for a local village hospital assumed definite shape, it found in Mrs. Plunkett a woman peculiarly adapted to assist in its advancement. Not only was she by nature endowed, like many of her associates, with a broad conception of Christian charity, and with that feminine power of accomplishment

which in old New England used to be called "faculty", but also she had already learned more than the average layman knew in those days about hygiene and sanitation. () She had an eager and fertile mind, which expressed itself by vivacious speech and facile writing. In any field of general or personal appeal, her efficiency was uncommonly productive."<sup>5</sup>

In 1884, Harriette Plunkett had published a book, titled: *"Women, plumbers and doctors, or, Household sanitation"*. The introductory note that she included in this book summarizes it all. It reads as a clear and imminent word of caution directed at anyone who would scoff at her book for being just a little bit too practical.

#### To critics

Those who, observing the generous quotations herein from high sanitary authorities, may say, "The book lacks originality", are reminded that sanitary science is a science of collated facts; that the aim has been to be instructive rather than original; to concentrate the existing light of to-day upon one small field: the home; and if the veteran sanitarian familiar should encounter "instances" and illustrations, he is reminded that the present endeavor is to arouse the interest and practical efforts of a new class – the women.

Harriette Hodge Plunkett  
Pittsfield, Mass, October 1884

The words of the young Carolyn's grandmother resound to this day as a strong beacon for any girl, any woman with a mind of her own. They served as a pre-modern encouragement, not merely of female assertion or emancipation as we would qualify this in our day. It was the prime message for Carolyn as a young girl to stand on her own two feet and assess the world as she would take it herself, no matter what partnerships or loyalties she would eventually commit herself to.

Harriette Hodge Plunkett was part of the young Carolyn's life and of the dinner table ambience until, in 1904, she died at the age of seventy-eight.

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<sup>5</sup>) Boltwood, p. 216