

# WAYNE AND HELEN LIGHT REMEMBER

BY KATHERINE KNIGHT AND JENNY NEWTON



A LIGHT MOMENT.

Wayne and Helen Light remember the middle 20's when Huppmobiles and horsedrawn carriages were the fashionable mode of travel over the rutted streets of Steamboat. They remember the days when Mount Werner was Storm Mountain and they remember taking the train to Mount Harris for their senior play. Wayne remembers his father, F. M. Light.

"He had asthma all of his life. He was a farmer and a schoolteacher, and he'd move from state to state to find a place where he wouldn't have asthma. He lived in Ohio, Oklahoma, Washington, and Missouri. While he was in Missouri my father met a traveling salesman who said, 'If I was gonna move anywhere, I'd move to Steamboat Springs, Colorado.'

"Dad took his advice and sold out back in Missouri. After that he brought the family, seven kids and the dog, on the railroad to Wolcott, Colorado. From there we spent two days coming to Steamboat on the Concord stage.

"We had to have a place to live so my father, Alma Baer's father and her uncle built us a

home. The total cost for the 18 x 36 foot, two story building was \$400. This building is now the garage. If you've built a house lately you know how far \$400 will go."

Glorious tales of the country brought Helen Long and her family to this area. "My uncles persuaded my parents to pack up the family and take the train to Saratoga, Wyoming in 1911. We also had seven kids but we didn't bring the dog. After spending a summer in Saratoga we moved to a ranch near where Energy Mine now is.

We really lived in the wilderness all right, we were living in a four room cabin with cattle roaming around and coyotes howling at night. I could never understand why my folks took such a chance with their family.

"Since there wasn't a school where we were, my mother was the school teacher. She got books from the county superintendant and we had school at home, which wasn't as easy as I thought it was going to be.

"A year later the Foil Canyon School, which sits one half mile this side of the Energy Mine

office, was built. I eventually taught at that school after I finished high school. I went through high school by staying with people and working for my room and board. Both Wayne and I graduated from high school in 1920."

An interesting fact about Wayne Light, that doesn't show in the least now, is that he was a very shy boy. "I was the most bashful kid that ever lived in Steamboat, or any place else! I can remember when the stonemasons were working on this house while we were living in what now is the garage. My mother wanted me to go and get some sand off the stone mason's pile for the chickens. I was so scared because the masons told me that they would cut off my ears if I came near them. I did it anyway, but only because my mother asked me to.

"Another time my bashfulness cost me some new marbles. I had just gone out and dumped the marbles on the ground on the playground, when the bell rang. I was afraid that I'd get in bad, so I ran in without gathering up my marbles, and, of course, when I came back they were all gone.

"It was hell being that bashful; I went through the first eight grades of school without raising my hand once to be excused to go to the toilet or to get a drink. I always told Helen that I hoped our kids weren't that way; they weren't.

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"THERE WERE THREE WORRIES IN THE FOX BUSINESS. FIRST, YOU WORRIED IF THEY WERE GOING TO HAVE PUPS..."

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"I was sixteen years old when my sister married a North Park rancher whose mother came from Prince Edward Island. It was there that the first silver foxes were raised in captivity. Silver fox pelts ran about \$900 a piece then. That is why my father started me in the silver fox business. We got our first foxes on October 20, 1919. Dad received them from Reedsburg, Wisconsin. The day we received them it started to snow. They never touched the ground again, until May.

"The worst mistake that was made in my 25 years of fox raising was my dad neglecting to send me to some place to learn how to take care of them. He thought that you could do all right feeding them a couple of slices of bread or some raw eggs and some milk, as you would a dog. That was not the case. The first two years the foxes had young, but they refused to raise them. We should have been raising four to a litter, but we barely produced two. Some of them would get about half grown and die. After several years, a successful fox man from Meeker taught me how

to care for our foxes properly. That first year my foxes averaged four to a litter. From then on the quantity of pups increased a bit every year.

"I'd start pelting my foxes about the 20th of November. First I'd do the actual skinning and then let the pelts cool. Next I'd have to flesh the pelts with a fleshing knife and a fleshing board, which would separate the skin from the flesh, so the pelt could dry. Then I'd put the pelt on a stretcher with the flesh side showing and leave it that way for 24 hours. After this time, I'd take the pelt off the stretcher and put the pelt fur side out. I had about 100 breeder foxes and about 200 to pelt each fall. Real Foxy!

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"THEN, YOU WORRIED  
IF THE PUPS WOULD LIVE..."

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"During the time I had the foxes, I butchered about 1200 head of horses. I'd go out and buy old horses that people wanted to put out of their misery, humanely. At that time I could get \$50 for the fox pelt and only pay \$5 for the horse.

"At first I had a meat grinder and bone grinder separate, but I finally got a thing called a "meathog" that ran off a Ford Model A engine. It would grind up the meat and bones together. One day I ground up some of my fingers in this machine. To work it properly, I had to put it in second gear and put all the gas on to get enough speed to run it. I had a stick to push in the clutch, to hold idling speed. On this particular day I was in a hurry, and forgot about pushing in the stick, so I accidentally cut off some of my fingers.

"It didn't hurt any more than if I had struck myself with a pin. It just pinched off the nerves. But I was never more shocked in all my life than when I pulled my hand out of there and saw what it looked like."

Helen stated "The first thing he said was I'll never be able to type again. But he types as well as he ever did."

Wayne's injury didn't keep him from his fur raising. He continued to raise silver foxes and many different kinds.

"Fox furs come in different varieties. There are all kinds of color mutations. The first silver foxes were mostly black with a little silver on them. They were actually a mutation that showed up in a litter of red foxes. Blue foxes are another type of fox that originated in Greenland. These had little round ears rather than pointy, due to the extreme cold.

I also raised red foxes and cross foxes which are distinguishable from all others on a pelt stretcher because their back shows a cross which is a dark stripe down the back and across





## A PRIZED POSSESSION!

their shoulders.”

Platinum foxes were an expensive and popular variety that Wayne raised. “In 1941, I bought two platinum males costing \$1500 a piece from Wyoming. At one time I had 18 of these foxes. The price went down a lot after I bought them. I got \$90 a piece for the 18 pelts. I was just like any other farmer; I couldn’t ask any price for my product, I had to take what someone offered me. I sold the foxes to a middle man in Denver, and they bought the furs cheap and sold them high.”

During the early 1920’s, when Wayne was busy raising foxes Helen began her career as a teacher. “I taught the second grade here in Steamboat and in three other country schools. In order for me to teach, I had to pass a county exam. That made me eligible to teach the second grade in some country schools. Before I could be accepted in Steamboat as a teacher I had to go to college. I went to the teaching college in Greeley for two summers and part of a winter.

“When I was teaching in Steamboat I started dating Wayne. There used to be big parties where two or three couples would go together. There was this one party on the top of the Cameo. A group of teachers went to this party. Wayne was there and he brought me home, and that

started our romance. Many people think that ours was a school romance, but it wasn’t. After that dance we began dating. Usually we went to the show or dancing. Quite often we went sage chicken hunting and fishing in the mountains. A lot of the time we rode to Long Lake and Trapper’s Lake on horseback.”

R. Wayne Light married Helen Long on July 1, 1925. Wayne’s father gave them a very practical wedding present. “When we went on our honeymoon, Dad gave us use of his new Hupp-mobile. We took it up to Yellowstone National Park and other points. We weren’t to drive it over 25 mph. If we went 160 mile in a day, that was pretty good. None of the roads were oiled. They were all gravel and pretty rough.”

Although Helen didn’t help Wayne with the foxes she had other jobs and activities that kept her busy. She belonged to many clubs, took care of her family, housed boarders and volunteered for the hospital. “I had various organizations I belonged to such as the L.R.C.’s, the Ladies Recreation Club. Wayne and I went to a supper club two times a week, of which Wayne is the only living member now. I had a bridge club that I thoroughly enjoyed; I still do enjoy playing bridge.

“A typical day of mine was to get up and fix breakfast for Wayne and the kids. Then I’d get all my children off to school. Next I’d do any of my household chores that needed to be done. Then, depending on the day I would go to my club meetings. My boarders also kept me very busy. Most of them were nurses. they liked to stay with us because we lived close to the hospital. The women boarders were served breakfast and dinner; we also had men boarders but they didn’t stay for meals. Our boarders got room and board for \$40 a month. We made some lifelong friends out of some of them.

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“LAST, YOU WORRIED ABOUT THE PRICE  
YOU WERE GOING TO GET.”

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“I helped with the hospital, they used to do a lot of sewing and mending sheets and garments. I would go up and get things that needed mending and distribute them to people who couldn’t get to the hospital. I also have been very active in church work at the Holy Name Catholic Church. I taught catechism classes for about 40 years. Wayne was an usher for many years.”

All profit making organizations need a type of security. Helen’s was her steady boarders, in Wayne’s case security came in the form of large dogs.

“We had to protect those valuable foxes. When I got the first foxes I got a Great Dane and that’s





## THE TANANA-ALASKAN FOX FARM

how I happened to get into the Great Dane business. After I started to raise them I found that I made more money on them than I did on foxes. If I ever raised dogs again I would raise something that didn't have to be made over. Great Danes had to have their ears cropped to make them stand erect. I hated to do that job but I had to do it in order to sell them.

"There were two things I fed my Great Danes, corn flakes and a type of mush. I'd buy the cornflakes by the ton from Kelloggs at Battlecreek, Michigan. They'd come in on the train. There were 60 gunny sacks to the ton. I'd put the corn flakes in a pan and put milk on them. The dogs would lap them up and they were quite healthy.

I also had an immense pressure cooker that I put the tough ends of the horse legs in and things that wouldn't grind up. First thing I'd do is pressure cook them, then I'd take the broth and cook cracked wheat in it. I had 2 cookers, one six gallon and one nine gallon. That mush would feed the dogs for a day or two. I had those Danes for 20 years. During those 20 years I sold 300 pups in 43 states. The going price was \$50 a dog. At that time it was good money. Now a Great Dane will cost you \$200 or \$300.

"When I wanted to quit raising Great Danes I traded three Danes for three mink from Washington. Then I bought a couple of other trios of mink, and kept a couple of Great Danes for guard dogs. I had mink for six years. Then the war came in 1941 and I couldn't get any help to take care of the mink and foxes because the fur business wasn't essential to the war effort. I pelled all the mink and sold all the skins. After that I just had foxes.

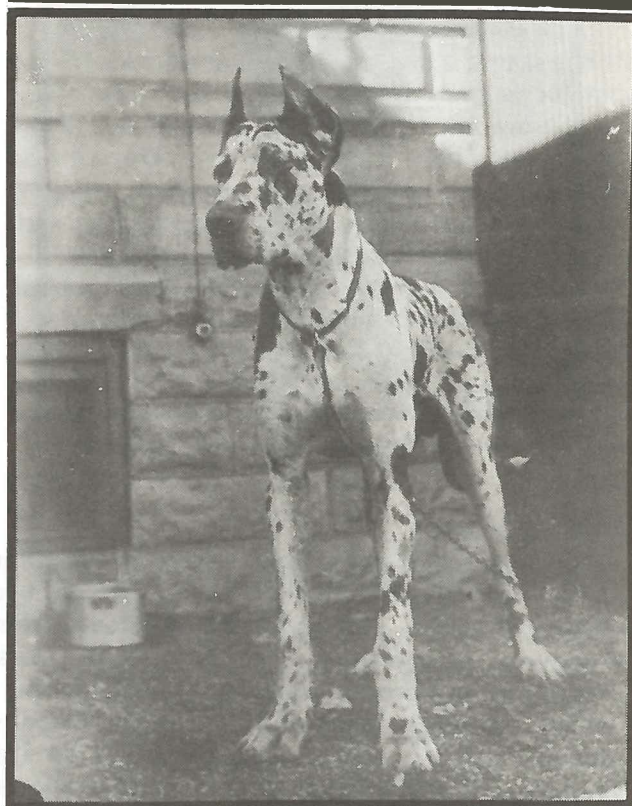
In 1942 all long haired fur went out of style, including foxes. Helen wanted me to quit. But I didn't know what to do with the fox farm, the pens and equipment and everything.

I should've taken Helen's advice five years earlier. After the foxes I sold life insurance, drove a school bus, and was a water commissioner for 25 years, regulating water in 400 ditches and 25 reservoirs. I worked in the territory above where the Elk River runs into the Yampa and on all the land from Hahn's Peak to Toponas. I liked that job because I could fish while I was on the different streams. Now I work for the Pilot delivering newspapers and the Whistle."

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"I LIKED THAT JOB BECAUSE I COULD FISH WHILE I WAS ON THE DIFFERENT STREAMS."

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PEELER'S DUKE

"I was born July 1, 1902 and have lived here 75 years. In that time I've never left Steamboat for more than three weeks at a stretch. I've seen a lot of change during this time and I believe automobiles changed Steamboat more than anything else. The first one I rode in was a Maxwell. My father was a Cadillac/Overland dealer in 1912 and 1913. That was at a time when people thought the horse and buggy was going to make a comeback."

Helen concluded: "We didn't like to see all this progress come to Steamboat especially the expansion at Mount Werner. Though, our children come to ski most every year but not this year. We have three children, 15 grandchildren, and two great grandchildren. Frank is the oldest





### A STEAMBOAT LANDMARK.

and he and his wife, Dotty own a music store in Springfield, Oregon. Diane and her husband Jerry live in Marshall, Minnesota. Diane is a registered nurse and works part time. Jerry is head of communications at Southwest Minnesota State College. Richard is a doctor, he is chief of pulmonary diseases at Long Beach Veterans hospital, he and his wife Linda and family live in Fountain Valley, California.

In 75 years the land that F.M. Light settled on and where Wayne and Helen still live has been

surrounded by the town. The elementary school is next door on one side, the hospital on the other side. There are homes on both banks of Soda Creek. Charlotte Perry's log house high on the West bank was built to house a man hired by the Lights to watch the mink and fox. And the old cow barn is now a home and a pottery studio. The beautifully cared for Victorian house and traditional barns, a reminder of other places, older times, are a testimony to Steamboat's proud past as are Helen and Wayne Light.

