

# Sherman Austin Fleming

Written by Berna Lewis - February, 2011

Sherman Austin Fleming was born June 10, 1886, the youngest of ten children in a farm family near Pepin, Wisconsin. This is my beloved father.

A brother died in infancy. His mother seemed to be a very compassionate lady, a good neighbor and a good wife too. She was French Canadian, raised in Presque Isle, Michigan. She married John Fleming at fourteen. At that time he was working in her father's saw mill at Nelson, Wisconsin but eventually became a successful farmer. A child died young. Nine children survived to adulthood.

Dad went into Pepin right away to become a telegrapher on the railroad. He started his career as a telegrapher and ended his working years as a station master, which included towns along the Mississippi River. In between, he managed lumber yards and worked the Alaska Highway stationed in White Horse. Along with these work ventures, dad helped raise 10 children.

I imagine dad worked hard growing up being in a big family and on a big farm. I've been told his mother raised pigs to send him into Pepin to high school. At that time, there were just 3 years and he graduated with the 3-year diploma. I can see him helping with the pigs.

I remember Dad singing at Christmas. We had a new baby and he said "hang up the baby stocking". Once when we had a cow, he would take a bunch of us, including the neighbors, to where the cow was tethered and let each of us take turns milking her. We also owned a Shetland pony for a while and my big brother delivered milk in our little town.

The working years were Depression years in which there were no jobs. Sometime on the way, Dad got into the lumber business. Right in the early part of the Depression he helped build a big building downtown in Pepin which had in it living quarters upstairs. There was a furniture store & office, a showroom, also an office for the lumber yard. The lumber was stored below.

During this time Mom and Dad worked as a team. She was the furniture store manager; he, the lumber. Together they managed the funerals in Pepin. They did most of the work even to furnishing the music. Mom was the pianist. They both lost these jobs and that started the period of struggle to put food on the table. Later, Dad managed a lumber yard at Bay City. Twice during this period he went to Alaska to work on the Alaskan Highway. When the war was over, he found jobs before he returned to the railroad.

Not all of us were home at the same time. The 3 oldest of our 10 went to college for several years before the Depression changed our financial status. During these tough years, several of us worked for the government, including Dad. The men worked at Civilian Conservation Corps camps. I worked on several different projects after I got my 3rd year of high school working as a nanny in New York City. I came home for my fourth year of high school. Then I worked the next year for the family. We all tried to keep together. Dad found this a better time because we had income coming in from several sources.

Dad and mother met when he stayed at the Saddler Rooming House in Pepin; they married in June of 1906. She was seventeen; he was twenty-one. Mother was the quieter one. She was the youngest of five. Dad was very gregarious. He loved children and enjoyed the big noisy family we were.

Dad also loved the outdoors so we went on many picnics. They were fun but not very fancy. He was a willing worker, too. The Depression was very hard on him in several ways. He wanted to provide but there was no work. Our government really helped us out.

My relationship with Dad was special in that I was needed for the second half of the ten. He rewarded me for helping (Saturday afternoon movies). Dad always thought I was able to control my life. We did practice being good Methodists. Mother helped in this, frequently playing the piano or singing in the church choir.

My father's faith in me encouraged and sustained me. He meant so much to me. Yes, I loved my father. The great thing was his full acceptance of me in every way. He encouraged me in my goals, especially in nursing and seemed to accept my marriage as well, never doing anything to me to make me feel inferior. Maybe that gave me confidence in myself. We liked going home and he loved the children.

Dad tried politics by being mayor of our small city. He ran for a county judgeship but was defeated.

His death was sudden. Not expected. He died in the car while trying to get it going in the snow. Dad was 71 by then. He was at peace but he was missed. His death left a big hole in my life and I still think of him often. I hope he would approve of the way I've lived, too.