

Carroll Yesteryears
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Zinkham Remembered for Life Spent Helping Others By Helena Zinkham

How might a city girl adapt to country life a hundred years ago? In 1917, Helena Lang, of Baltimore City, married George Martin Zinkham, a veterinarian in Carroll County. His World War I military service kept them apart for two years, and she continued to live with her parents in a small row house near Druid Hill Park. Helena was born in Germany in 1888, but her parents immigrated to Baltimore in 1893, and she grew up in this urban area with three sisters and two brothers.

After completing elementary school, Helena worked at different jobs including factory seamstress and Sunday school teacher in the German Reformed Church. She also applied to the Mount Wilson Sanitarium where she learned to care for children. Her pastor's reference letter described a woman of excellent moral character and fidelity--easily loved by children.

As soon as "Doc" Zinkham returned from the war in 1919, the couple settled into a small house in Bark Hill, moving soon to Uniontown and then Union Bridge. The city girl learned to feed her husband and two sons year round from a large backyard filled with a vegetable garden, chickens, and even turkeys. She sewed clothes from the patterned cloth of flour sacks. Nothing went to waste, but her reputation remained one of helping others.

Over the next twenty-five years, their home was the hub of a busy veterinary practice. "Doc" Zinkham became mayor of Union Bridge from 1940-1944, but most of his life was on the road calling at farms. Mrs. Zinkham made sure that in a pre-cell phone era, farmers could always reach him. She set aside social activities and stayed within earshot of the home phone, building an impressive network among farmers' wives and local stores where messages could be left for "Doc." Their workday began at 4:30 a.m. and often continued into the night with emergency calls about sick animals.

When German prisoners of war arrived in Carroll County during World War II, Mrs. Zinkham's German roots were put to use translating at times and providing breakfasts. When the war ended, Americans began to help rebuild Europe where so many people were starving and homeless. "Doc" Zinkham donated his talents to test and vaccinate more than 3,000 cattle shipped overseas from the Roger Roop farm for the now famous Heifer Project. Mrs. Zinkham contributed by sending many packages of food and clothing to cousins who lived near Pirmasens in southwest Germany. She had visited these families in 1913 but lost touch between the wars.

More than fifty thank you letters have survived. The cousins wrote back to express deep appreciation for the lard, flour, rice, sugar, oats, soup stock, powdered milk and eggs, coffee and tea, bacon, shoelaces and stockings. They described excitement at being able to bake again after many years without basic staples. They sent needlework in return along with family news.

“Doc” Zinkham died in 1964 and Mrs. Zinkham in 1972. When her box of special World War II letters came to light, they confirmed that helping others is what mattered most in both her city and country life.

Guest columnist Helena Zinkham is the granddaughter of George M. and Helena Lang Zinkham.

Photo credit: Dr. William H. Zinkham

Photo caption: This photograph, taken in 1917, shows Helena Lang Zinkham, wife of the veterinarian Dr. George M. “Doc” Zinkham. She and her husband were a much-loved team who served the people around Union Bridge for more than 40 years.