

For those of you who do not know her, let me begin by introducing Mrs. Ruth Long who is pictured here. Back over six decades ago Ruth, like many people in Albion, was well acquainted with a local character you might say, by the name of Florence Budd Simmons. Her obituary, which can be found in both Albion newspapers back in December 1947, was extremely short. It notes that she was 78 years old, a former resident of Albion who had lived on Platt Street and that she had died after several years in the Rochester State Hospital. The obituary mentions: "She was a well-known figure for many years on local streets which she traveled with a small cart drawn by a dog." Ruth Long knew Florence better than most and saw her as a caring and loving person with deep concern for others. Taken with these attributes and quali-

ties, Ruth many years ago sat down and wrote her first and only short story. It's about Florence Budd as she was known. In this story Ruth refers to the depression years. By this she means not the Great Depression, but that times were generally hard for her family and many others. Ruth's father, in fact, was a tenant farmer and she remembers that their family moved 26 times in 25 years. After all that, and now many years ago, Ruth said, "When I get my own home I'm never moving again." Well, she hasn't because in 1923 she married the late Ed Long and they moved to McKinstry Street where Ruth still resides. It was here she saw Florence Budd for what she was.

It's now with appreciation to Ruth and pride that we present here her short story.

## The Most Unforgettable Character I Have Ever Met

By Ruth Long

No one ever knew how old she was. She seemed ageless, unchanging with the passing years. You would never find her in today's modern world. She was a ministering angel in those depression years, the pious piper of our day.

Seeing her for the first time, you might think her strange indeed, but no one who knew her ever laughed at her, even the children, or I should say especially the children.

Happy was the day for a child in the summer-time when Florence was sighted coming down the street. The cry went up "Here comes Florence," and the children would come running from all directions to meet her. We had to inspect her cart, a two-wheeled affair with a handle to push it by.

There was always a bag of candy tucked away somewhere. After walking beside the cart for a ways, we would beg her for a song. She could sing folk songs and hymns with a voice that was sweet to our ears. We would follow her as far as we dared, and then turn reluctantly back, more children taking our place.

Her clothing never varied, probably because it was seldom changed. The fastidious would prob-

ably have some non-descript long sleeved blouse, a voluminous skirt and petticoat that swept the floor, a dark print sunbonnet reminiscent of covered wagon days and long cotton stockings that were filled with her treasures. They really bulged all around her legs. Every child loved to watch her make change. Up would come her dress while she searched in her stockings for her purse. Then we could get a look at the bulging stockings and puzzle as to what she carried in them.

In winter she added a man's heavy overcoat, buckle arctics and a heavy scarf, worn much as teen-age girls wear theirs now. The heavy winter clothing was necessary because she spent much of her time on the road and I mean literally. It was her self-appointed task to keep the streets clean.

She picked up glass, pea vines, nails and all litter. I asked her once why she picked up glass and nails and she said, "some child could fall on the glass and get badly cut, or an auto might get a flat tire." She kept a basket, broom and shovel for picking up manure. This she sold to the ladies for the precious flowers. Sometimes people would give her tiny plants when they thinned out their flower garden and Florence would sell them for a penny



Photo by Dr. James Orr

It was in winter we loved her best, for then she came into our home to warm herself. Invariably she stayed for a meal. She always insisted in paying 25 cents for her meal. She knew how to cook too. She showed my mother how to cook Swiss steak that was truly delicious. I still fix it that way today. After the meal we children would enjoy our

own private concert. She would sit cross-legged on the floor and sing to us and tell us stories. Sometimes she would doze because of the warmth of the room. Children of today would probably ridicule her because of her strangeness, but we loved her visits.

She never had a reason for coming but it seemed she always arrived at an opportune time. One summer day Florence rushed to our door and told my mother that my small brother was lying out in the hot sun and looked ill. They carried him inside and Florence went to work. She looked in his mouth and saw his tongue was spotted with red spots. He was very feverish. She made a cone out of paper, and put some powdered sulphur in the cone. Then she blew it into his mouth. In a short time his temperature was down and the spots had disappeared.

One day several dogs were fighting in the road in front of a neighbor's house. Florence walked up to them and spoke to them. They stopped immediately as if she had worked a charm on them.

In our house she was always welcome. Though she was uneducated in the usual sense of the word, she was certainly a treasure chest of knowledge. She knew what to do for an ailing child no matter what was wrong, even though she never had one of her own. She would bring jars of her home-made salve to sell along the way. It was dark brown and smelled of tar and was wonderful for skinned knees and elbows.

Looking back on those days, I believe the good Lord put her in our little corner of the earth to make more bearable those trying depression years. I, for one, shall never forget her and I believe she is even now sitting in a little corner of heaven singing to some little angels.