

Martin Algott (Albert) Jacobson



was born in Bro Annex-Goteborg och Bohus, Sweden June 21st 1872 to Gustaf Jacobson and Anna Maja (Marie) Sohlerg. He was one of nine children and came with family to Cumberland, Wisconsin in 1882 emigrating from Norway. At the age of eighteen in 1890, he and a friend Andrew Hanson came to the new state of Montana. Martin worked in the mines of Butte for a year, then was lured further west in 1891 by stories of mining activities around Libby, in the northwest part of the state. There he was engaged in mining as foreman or miner for mining companies and also on his own. Between mining ventures he worked in mercantile stores.

On a visit back to Cumberland, Wisconsin in 1898 Martin met Helma Hanson. A romance blossomed, but Helma was only sixteen years old, too young to marry. Helma and Martin kept in touch by correspondence after Martin returned to Libby. He journeyed again to Cumberland for their marriage on February 19, 1901, then brought his bride to Libby, Montana. Their marriage was the second of three Jacobson brothers to marry three Hanson sisters.



Helma Angeline Hanson was born February 28, 1882 in Turtle Lake,



Wisconsin. She was a daughter of Norwegian parents, Carl Hanson and Berte Naria Andreasdatter who emigrated from Vestre Toten, Norway three days after their wedding, arriving in Whitehall, Wisconsin July 10, 1878.

Helma assisted Martin in doing the assessment work in his mines as was required by law. A charge of dynamite was set in the mine with a fuse long enough to give them time to retreat out of the tunnel. After the blast and all dust had settled they entered to clear out the blasted ore. Martin and a partner had built a log cabin near the mine location on Cherry Creek. It was destroyed in a snow-slide one winter and was rebuilt, but in a different location.

In September 1903 Helma traveled on the Great Northern railroad to Cumberland, Wisconsin for the birth of their first child, Myrtle, born September 28, 1903 in Helma's parent's home in Cumberland, Wisconsin Section 10. Helma stayed over for the wedding of her sister, Olive and Hans Oscar, Martin's younger brother on November 8, 1903. Their marriage was the third of three Jacobson brothers to marry three Hanson sisters.

Through experience gained working in the photograph studio of Gus Hufslund in Cumberland before her marriage, Helma was an influence in interesting Martin in photography. Before opening a studio around 1904, or there abouts, they took pictures and became quite good in the endeavor.

Helma assisted in the functions of the studio, mostly retouching, coloring and waiting on customers when Martin was away, busy in the dark-room or with portrait sittings.

During the intervening years four more children were born to this marriage; Irene Mildred born August 30, 1905, Chester Garth born May 2, 1908, Milton Everett born May 2, 1911 and Kenneth James born June 3, 1913.

On January 11, 1907 Martin and Helma bought a completely furnished house in South Libby from George Walker, who anticipated a marriage, but was not consummated. Chester was born in that house. The family walked to town and the studio on wooden sidewalks made of logs and planks.

About May 1, 1909 Martin and Helma with their three children, Myrtle age 5 years, Irene age 3 years and Chester age 1 year left Libby for Newport, Washington thinking it may be a better location for a studio. However, the stay was of short duration. What prompted the move back to Libby is not quite clear. It may have been because Helma experienced a near kidnapping of her two daughters who were playing dress-up with their mothers clothes in the woodshed. Helma looked out a window over-looking an open field as a covered wagon drawn by two horses came in view. Two gypsy men descended from the wagon and started walking toward the woodshed. Helma rushed out and hurried the youngsters into the house. Watching through the window the gypsies were observed picking up the clothes in the woodshed. In those years gypsies were known to pick up children so it was natural for parents to be concerned.

On December 14, 1909 Martin became a naturalized citizen of the United States of America.

January 17, 1910 Martin and Helma bought a lot on Mineral Avenue in Libby to build a new studio with living quarters. They named it "The Art Studio". The building was of wood construction with simulated stone block galvanized siding. The studio building housed a store facing the street, also a door opening to a stairway leading to the studio upstairs. Living quarters were living-dining room and a kitchen. There also was a second stairs for family use. Upstairs were two bedrooms, hall, reception room, studio with skylight and the dark-room. Electric lights were the first for the family. For heat there were four stoves located in the store, living-dining room, kitchen and the studio upstairs. During cold winter days a round kerosene heater was used in the dark-room.

On the alley, a shed the width of the lot housed the woodshed, coal bin and the privy. A board walk and clothes lines on either side extended from the back porch of the studio-home to the woodshed. During the summer, Martin ordered many dump truck loads of slab wood for winter use. The children piled the wood in the yard to dry and invariably a needle was used afterwards to remove the splinters. In early fall the wood was thrown into the woodshed and piled again.

At first, in conjunction with the studio, the store was an ice cream parlor, then replaced with candy, tobacco, cigars, notions, postcards, a few staples and toys at Christmas time for several years. After 1915 or thereabouts, it was strictly a studio. Kodak's were becoming popular so kodak finishing was more profitable. In the studio-store brackets held long strips of molding from which Martin made picture frames. Beneath were boxes of ore from a mine to show prospective buyers of mining stock.

For a couple of years, about 1912 twice a month on Saturdays, Martin traveled to Troy, Montana on the early morning train and returned on the evening train. Sometimes one or two of his children would accompany him. He also visited neighboring towns east of Libby on the Great Northern railroad to photograph sawmills and associated operations. About 1916 he went to Bonners Ferry, Idaho to take a panorama picture of the Bonners Ferry sawmill.

Martin rode in and photographed the first car, a Studebaker to travel over the first highway between Libby and Troy, a distance of eighteen miles and part of the Lincoln Highway.

For several years Martin made calendars for business firms using his scenic views or of their own establishments. The children delivered the calendars on their sled.

Martin was also a volunteer fireman, having joined the Libby Volunteer Fire Department at its inception. A fire station was built next door to the studio and a telephone installed in the studio building to receive fire calls. Behind the station was a high bell tower. Martin slept in his underwear so no time would be lost in dressing if there was a night call. When a fire call came at night Martin grabbed his pants with suspenders, dashed down the stairs to answer the telephone, rushed out back to ring the bell long enough to arouse other volunteers, then into the station to hand crank the fire truck engine. Sometimes other volunteers were at the station before Martin drove the fire truck out, sometimes not, depending on weather and length of time to warm the fire truck engine. Sometimes Helma sent one of the children running to the fire with father's coat and hat.

In January 1918 Martin took the train to Washington state hoping to find a new location. With his view camera and panorama camera he took pictures in Tacoma, Seattle, Ballard, Mukilteo and Everett, all on Puget Sound. Leaving the coast about April he went to the Okanogan country near the Canadian border in north central Washington. Some of the towns he took panorama pictures of were: Oroville, Molson, Tonasket and Okanogan. Today, some of his pictures are in the Okanogan Historical Museum in Okanogan, Washington. In Oroville, Washington Martin rented a two story building with a skylight which at one time had housed a studio on the upper floor. After school was out in June the family joined him in Oroville. In August Martin returned to Libby and Helma and children followed later in time for the opening of school in September.

In the spring of 1919 Martin went to work for the J. Neils Lumber Company to supplement the inadequate income of the studio. His health began to fail that summer and worsened until he became bedridden before Christmas.

Even though living in the studio building was convenient it also posed some problems. The children contracted measles that fall of 1919 and with Martin ill and having difficulty walking, Helma endured a heavy burden. The doctor posted a quarantine on the store front and pasted paper strips over the cracks around the doors between living quarters and the studio-store. A trunk with formaldehyde to disinfect Martin's clothes was in a hall and he had to change clothes every time he left or entered the living quarters, coming or going by the back door and the studio store door in front.

On February 6, 1920 Martin returned home after a couple of weeks at Camas Hot Springs, Montana taking hot bath treatments. Three days later on February 9 he passed away. he was forty-seven years old. Martin's brother, Ole arrived two days later. he had visited a cousin in Portland, Oregon and stopped off in Libby to visit Martin and family on his way back to his home in Cumberland, Wisconsin. he arrived on the early morning train, unaware that Martin had passed away. The funeral was delayed until the arrival of Helma's mother from Nevis, Minnesota. The funeral service was held in the studio-store with volunteer firemen as pall bearers and the fire truck served as a hearse for the drive to the cemetery.

Helma continued to operate the studio doing portraits and kodak finishing, but times were difficult financially. Even the woodshed and coal bin were empty in the winter of 1920-1921, but a good samaritan unloaded wood during the night.

In the spring of 1924 Helma sold the studio-home building and with Irene, Milton and Kenneth moved to Wenatchee, Washington.

On September 14, 1930 Helma lost her life in an automobile accident in Wenatchee. She was forty-eight years old. Helma was laid to rest next to Martin in the Libby cemetery. Their marker very appropriately has a figure of a photographer and camera which sons Chester and Kenneth designed.



The studio-home building in Libby was razed December 7, 1966 for customer bank parking and was over fifty-six years old.



Martin was one of Libby's true early day pioneers.

With his wife, Helma they contributed a pictorial record of a by-gone era.