

CHAPTER 2: FAMILY & EARLY YEARS

HVH & NIV: Two Men Who Wanted to do Much

"Man is the architect of his own destiny." It is an inspiring and noble thought, but I cannot help but doubt the assertion when I look back and see how often chance has moved the pawn of my existence across the chessboard of life. (Harry V. Harlan, *One Man's Life with Barley*, page 3)

Jack Rodney Harlan was deeply influenced by his father, Harry Vaughn Harlan (HVH), the son of Plato F. Harlan and Elizabeth (Lizzie) Phillipi Harlan, grandson of David S. and Mary Cowman Harlan, and brother of Roscoe, Dora and Helen Harlan and half-brother to Ernest, Orlando and Herchel Harlan. Harry was born near London Mills, Illinois on February 19, 1882. His mother wanted to name him Harry, but she could not think of a middle name for her baby boy. As she wondered about this, a knock came at her front door. When she opened the door, she saw a little man whom she could see was a hobo. He asked her if she had something for him to eat and when she brought him some food, she asked him what his name was. He replied that his name was Vaughn. "That's it", she thought. "I'll name my son Harry Vaughn Harlan." Thus, a family tradition was born. There are now five generations of Harlan sons with the middle name Vaughn: Harry Vaughn Harlan (1882), Bill (Wilbur) Vaughn Harlan (1914), Harry Vaughn Harlan (1946), Leo Vaughn Harlan (1975) and Henry Vaughn Harlan (2005). All but the first Harry were eldest sons.

Five years after Harry Vaughn Harlan was born, on November 25, 1887, Nikolai Ivanovich Vavilov (NIV) was born to Ivan Ilyich and Alexandra Mikhailovana Vavilov in Moscow (Pringle, *The Murder of Vavilov*, 2008, page 307). Ivan Ilyich Vavilov was a successful merchant in that great city. Nikolai was a bright young boy and destined to become one of the most important plant scientists of the twentieth century. Nikolai Vavilov would also have an immensely powerful effect on the life of Jack Harlan. These two men, HVH & NIV were two men who wanted to do much, and they had a tremendous impact on the life of Jack Harlan who then also wanted to do much.

Plato Harlan was not an active Quaker. He never officially joined any of the Quaker meetings; but he did maintain some of the Quaker mannerisms and personal lifestyle, one of which was to never show his emotions. A story was told by Jack Harlan in a taped conversation with this author in 1996 about young Harry and his father, Plato Harlan, and it goes like this (Jack speaking):

I remember my father telling about when he was a youngster. He was fooling with a gun, a rifle. Apparently, he did quite a bit of hunting when he was a kid – and the rifle went off and the bullet went right over his father’s head. His father was reading the newspaper. Without raising his voice, he said: “Get the hell out of here.” One didn’t show emotions. As a matter of fact, my father didn’t like to go to plays, or at least tragedies, because he was afraid somebody would see him crying. And he would cry pretty easily, as would I. But we didn’t want anybody to catch us. There were many Quakerisms in his behavior. For instance, he had the habit of wearing his hat inside – at the office. Finally, Mary Martini (Harry’s long-time assistant) kidded him out of the practice. But he was very shy as a young man. It took him a long time to get over it. He did, finally. He developed a lot of poise. He gave lectures to packed audiences at the National Geographic Society and so on.

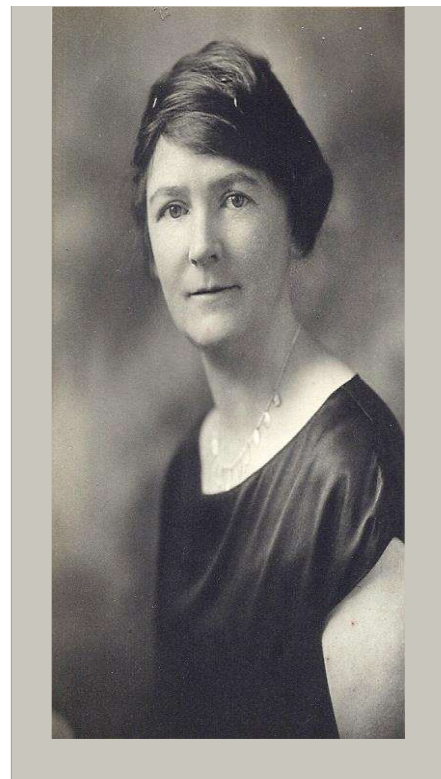
Allow this author to insert something from Jean Harlan’s autobiography which is of some interest.

I don’t know too much about Doc’s (Harry’s) early life, although once I met his mother who was then around ninety, still living alone, keeping a garden and chickens, getting up early to make pies, running off prospective suitors with a shot gun, a real peppery tiny mite of a lady. I never knew Gussie’s mother; she must have died before I met Jack. But I know a lot about her family. Gussie’s father was a farmer. They seem to have had a lot of fun as kids: a lot of the things Gussie told me sound like Laure Ingles Wilder. They went camping in their horse drawn wagon and on picnics to this place and that. She had a sister, May, who was, I think, about three years younger, and twin brothers, Ward and Willis who were, I think, three years younger than May. Gussie graduated (I think) from college at 18. She and Doc got acquainted in college and I think had a wonderful time. Some of their college friends remained friends throughout their lives. There is a picture of a play they were in, an old-fashioned melodrama, and they both look full-of-beans. Gussie looks like a sparkling, dynamic person. All those pictures look like a very fun-loving young girl, and very pretty. They wanted to get married, but first Doc had to have a job. There is a packet of letters that Doc wrote Gussie during that period, when he was going around the country looking

for a place to live and work. If you read them you will see that he really thought Arkansas was pretty and thought it would be a great place to live, but there was a disease which he associated with swamps. I suppose it was malaria, so he decided against Arkansas. Then he went to Oklahoma and again, he liked the country around Muskogee, but the people were low class and I think maybe were living in soddies (sod houses), and he didn't want to take a lady like Gussie to a place like that. Then came the offer to go to the Philippines and they got married and left.



Harry Vaughn Harlan



Augusta Goodrich Griffing

The photo on the left has an interesting story. It was emailed to this author from his sister, Sherry, living in California, on February 11, 2021. On an attached note, was written, by hand: "Hi. This was found in an attic in Waynesboro, VA when one of my neighbors was moving out. Glad to get it back in the family. Nancy".

Getting back to the story of Harry V. Harlan, young Harry was an intelligent child and showed a desire to somehow leave the confines of the family farm. His opportunity came when he was able to enter Kansas State College of Agriculture in Manhattan, Kansas. One of his friends had gone to college and so Harry thought he would try it and there was this college nearby, in Manhattan, so he went. At college he met and fell in love with a classmate, Augusta Goodrich Griffing, a farm girl from near Manhattan, Kansas and the granddaughter of Rev. James Sayre Griffing, who was instrumental in the founding of Kansas State College of Agriculture at Manhattan. Augusta's father, William James Griffing, had bought a farm near Manhattan so that his children could be near the college (See chapter 1). Harry was destined for adventure. In his autobiography, *One Man's Life with Barley*, this is the way he tells of a true moment of destiny:

On graduation in 1904 I took two civil-service examinations some three months apart. One day a wire came from Mark Carleton in the United States Department of Agriculture offering me a job. I did not even know a wire to him in care of the department would reach him, so I went into the next room to look up his address in order to say "yes" very hastily, but before I found it I was again called to the phone. There was a cable from Manila offering me a position in the Philippines at the enormous salary of \$1,200. I took the one in Manila in 1905, remaining until 1908. I knew a rich girl who had \$150. Combining this with my resources gave me \$300, all the money anybody would ever need, I thought, so I married and started out. The \$300 not only proved ample; we have since doubled it. (Harlan, *One Man's Life with Barley*, 1957, page 3)

Historical Interlude

A word of historical explanation is needed at this point. Spain had boasted the greatest colonial empire of its time (16th through 18th centuries). It was the first for which it has been said that "the sun never set on its empire." The Spanish empire began with Christopher Columbus' "discovery of America" in 1492. Christopher Columbus was, in fact, the last person to "discover America", but he got all the credit. This author does not understand why he got the credit, except that this is a good example of the power of PR. At its zenith in the 18th century the Spanish Empire was impressive. From Wikipedia we read:

Administered from Madrid by the Spanish Crown, the empire comprised territories and colonies in Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Oceania. It originated during the Age of Exploration after the voyages of Christopher Columbus and lasted until the late 19th century. Spain's territorial reach beyond Europe included the Greater Antilles, half of South America, most of Central America, and much of North America (including present day Mexico, Florida, the Southwestern, Midwestern, and Pacific Coastal regions of the United States), as well as a number of Pacific Ocean archipelagos including the Philippines. (Wikipedia)

Beginning in the early 19th century the great Spanish empire began to decline. The final blow came in 1898 when America defeated Spain in the “Spanish-American War”. Spain’s empire had been reduced to Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Philippines before the final war. At the Paris Peace Treaty of 1898 America was given Cuba, Guam & Puerto Rico. The Philippines came with a price of \$20 million, due to the infrastructure improvements which Spain claimed to have invested in the island nation. At any rate, America suddenly had a small empire of its own. Back home, some Americans were in favor of the empire, but many others wanted to stick to the policy laid out by George Washington of “non-intervention in the affairs of other nations.” Nevertheless, the United States of America found itself overseeing a small, Spanish speaking empire.

The transition of the Philippines from Spain to America, itself, included several remarkable events. The Spanish-American war was fought primarily in Cuba; but the adversaries gathered in Manila Bay, the Philippines, to join in the fight. Meanwhile Filipino resistance forces assembled on the hills above the bay. They had been trying to throw off the European colonists for some time now. Unbeknownst to the rebels, word came to the American and Spanish that the contest was over and a peace treaty signed in Paris: America had won. The Americans and the Spanish forces conspired to stage a mock naval battle for the benefit of the natives. America won the mock battle and Spanish forces withdrew from the islands. The ruse worked – for all three parties. Everybody was happy except the resistance fighters, who still wanted their own country. So, following the retreat of the Spanish there commenced the Philippine–American war of 1898-1902 between America and the resistance fighters.

This was no minor conflict:

The ensuing Philippine-American War lasted three years and resulted in the death of over 4,200 American and over 20,000 Filipino combatants. As many as 200,000 Filipino civilians died from violence, famine, and disease. To see more, open in new window:

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1899-1913/war>.

Following the end of the war America sought ways to deal with their Asian possession in a peaceful and helpful way. Thousands of American teachers were hired to move to the Philippines for three years at a time and teach English in the schools. The Filipinos had learned Spanish and spoke it, along with their native tongue, for 300 years. Now, it was the American's turn and they sent shiploads of young college graduates to teach in the new Filipino schools. According to US records, Harry V. Harlan was assigned to a school in Nueva Valencia, on the southeast tip of Guimaras Island, which is between Panay Island and Negros Island, on the middle side of the western portion of the Philippine Islands.

Harlan is mentioned in a list of US employees in the Philippines in a document entitled "Official Roster of Officers and Employees in the Civil Service of the Philippine Islands", prepared by the government of the Philippine Islands, Bureau of Civil Service, January 1, 1908. The list was entitled: "Civil Service of the Philippine Islands, Department of Public Instruction, Bureau of Education", Harlan, Harry V. is listed (on page 66) as from Illinois, beginning his employment on Dec. 24, 1905 and a (standard) salary of \$2,400 per year. This figure is twice as much as Harry remembered it in his biography.

"Harlan, Harry V." appears in a list of teachers who were separated from the Philippine education program as of the "end of leave", which was school year 1907-08. Assuming that the Philippine school system was set up the same way as the American system, Harlan taught the second semester of school year: 1904-05, school years 1905-06, 1906-07 and finished the school year 1907-08. So, he taught in the Philippines for 3 ½ years. According to Jack, Gussie taught homemaking.

In another publication found on-line, the population of Nueva Valencia was listed in the first census, which the US had called for in 1902 after the fighting had stopped. In Table 4: "Civilized Population of Provinces and Comandancias, by Municipalities and Barrios" / Province of Jloilo is listed as follows:

NUEVA VALENCIA	<u>3,459</u>
Poblacion	566
Cab alaguari	523
Concordia	365
Doloras	436
Guiuanon	161
La Paz	259
Salvacion	432
Santa Ana	261
Tando	446

From the descriptions that this author’s grandmother told him as a child and from the pictures she had in her scrapbooks the village where they lived was pretty primitive, with people living in grass huts and, as said grandmother often said were, “running around naked.” At this point it is not known which village Harry was in, but it probably does not matter. We can get a general idea of the size of the village from the above list.

In 1941 the estimated population of the Philippines reached 17,000,000; Manila's population was 684,000. By then, some 27% of the population could speak English as a second language, while the number of Spanish speakers as first language had further fallen to 3% from 10-14% at the beginning of the century. However, Spanish as a second language continued to be spoken and understood at varying levels of expertise, far more than English. In 1936, Tagalog was selected to be the basis for a national language. In 1987, the Tagalog language was imposed as the national language. (From “Demographics of the Philippines”, Wikipedia)

The Philippines was granted independence from America on July 4, 1946. In 1964 Philippine Independence Day was changed to June 12.



Harry V. and Augusta G. Harlan with their bicycles in the Philippines, 1905-08.



A Filipino Headhunter and his hut, from photos by HVH taken in 1905-08

Harry V. Harlan lived a most extraordinary life and enjoyed telling people that he was just a Kansas farm boy. When he was young, Harry was very shy. He could scarcely answer the roll call at

school, but he got over that by a sheer force of will. Later in life he became quite a jolly man, with a quick mind, always apt to come up with an outrageous statement. He loved the ironic and the sad tale of man's greatest plans backfiring. He was master of the understatement and of dry humor. The following is reprinted from his autobiography, *One Man's Life with Barley*, (page 51-52):

One day in the basins (of Abyssinia) I was made conscious of the lofty estate from which man has fallen. We met a local family on the march. At the head of the procession was a donkeyess, or whatever the female of that omnipresent beast of burden is called. The animal was almost concealed by a huge pile of family bedding. On top of the bedding sat the husband, cross-legged, smoking. Alongside ran three or four children. Behind the donkeyess, poking it with a stick, was the wife. She was heavily pregnant. She carried a year-old child on one hip while on her head was a sack of flour and around her neck was slung the foal of the donkey. Our curiosity was aroused, and we stopped to gossip and gather a few details of the strange procession. Were they going far? About eight miles. How far had they come? About the same. Was she tired? No. Why was she carrying the foal? It didn't follow well and it was easier to carry it than to drive it. I know men in America so spineless that they serve breakfast to their wives in bed.

Harry also had a serious side and a studious side. In *One Man's Life with Barley* (page 35) he recalls that he was once revolted by a bull fight he saw in Spain; and his studious side had to be exercised in analyzing his collections and publishing results. That had to be done in the highest of scientific parlance. In *One Man's Life with Barley* (page 10) he expressed great joy at finally being able to write what he had been feeling for so long and not be under "the shadow of the guillotine of orthodox scientific expression."

Harry began working for the USDA in 1910. He and Gussie lived in Washington, DC. In 1913 he was approached for some work in Peru. He wrote in his biography (page 14): "Officials of the Southern Railroad of Peru had requested the United States Department of Agriculture to suggest someone to give them advice on agricultural matters. In this case I was suggested largely because I had been in the Philippines. Peru was in the tropics: the Philippines were in the tropics. What choice could be more logical? If there were two places that differ more, I have not seen them. I doubt that they have a dozen native plants in common." Harry accomplished the work in Peru in six months' time, while still employed by the USDA and returned to DC in March 1914 to work for the USDA full

time. While in Peru he wrote many letters home to his lovely wife, Augusta. Their first son, Bill, was born May 7, 1914 shortly after Harry's return from Peru. Harry also received a Doctor of Science degree from the University of Minnesota in 1914. What he did was to establish some experimental barley plots at the University of Minnesota, and he was able to take courses, pursuing his doctorate at the university while he was at the same time working his barley fields for USDA. Minnesota has an excellent climate for barley. He obtained a Doctor of Science Degree in 1914. According to Jack Harlan Harry got the DSc degree without telling his superiors in Washington, "and when they found out, it was kind of a flap."

WVH, JRH & DC

When Jack was growing up the Harlan family lived in a two-story house in Washington DC near 42nd St. In those days there were only a few houses in their neighborhood; however, there were enough children to form a small sandlot baseball team. One neighbor had some dairy cows, and chickens were standard fare. The closest house was owned by a man named Wilbur Bill. He was a good friend of Harry, who honored Mr. Bill by naming his first son after him. The new son was given his father's middle name, "Vaughn". Thus, Bill Vaughn Harlan was born in Washington, DC on May 7, 1914. The name "Wilbur" was often associated with him and many people, including this author, his nephew, Harry V. Harlan (HVH2), until researching this book, thought that his real name was Wilbur and Bill was a nickname. To me Uncle Bill was WVH.¹

Jack Rodney Harlan (JRH) was born, also while his parents lived in the same house, in Washington, DC, on June 7, 1917.

Mr. Bill's wife was known by the Harlan boys as Grandma Bill. The house that the Harlans lived in was designed by Harry Harlan, himself. He made it similar to Mr. Bill's because he liked the style. He filled the den with artifacts from the Philippines and from Peru. It was like a museum. Children would come down the alley by the house and look through the window, marveling at what they were seeing. The Philippines collection is now in the University of Illinois museum.

¹ My sister, Sherry, who spend many of Uncle Bill's last years with him, insists that his given name was Wilbur; although Bill Harlan's autobiography ("looking back at my life", 2001) uses the name Bill exclusively when referring to himself.



Bill (Wilbur) V. Harlan

Jack Rodney Harlan

Note the quiet determination in the eyes of Jack Harlan in the lower photo. Even as a youth he has that confident – not arrogant — but quietly confident gaze, which he acquired at four years of age, when he decided to be a plant explorer, after hearing about Nikolai Vavilov.

Meanwhile (1914) Europe was erupting into what would become known as World War I. The war was primarily between Germany and Austria-Hungary against Britain, France and Russia, however, it drew in several other nations, including the United States. In February 1917, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia abdicated and in October the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia. Nikolai I. Vavilov had been made a professor at the Faculty of Agronomy, University of Saratov. The Russian Civil War began and Vavilov’s son, Oleg, was born, November 7, 1918. (Pringle, 2008, page 308)

The Great War raged in Europe for 4 years. When it ended, but before all the shooting stopped and the mine fields were cleared², Harry V. Harlan was sent by the US Government, as part of a delegation, to Eastern Europe to assess that region's ability to feed itself. This was in 1919. Harry again wrote many letters back to Gussie. The last one, dated Aug. 4, 1919, tells of a Cabaret he went to with Dr. Surface and others in Paris. At the entrance to the Cabaret there is a sign (in French): "*Be sure you have no better use for your money before you buy a ticket to enter here.*" In spite of what may have happened in the Cabaret, Harry made it back to the states in one piece and resumed his work in DC. For more, see (open in a new window): <https://ara1919.wordpress.com/>.

HVH meets NIV

In 1921 the Russian Government sent Nicolai Ivanovich Vavilov to the United States to purchase seeds to help stem the continuing food shortage in Russia. According to Peter Pringle's biography of Vavilov, he visited the Department of Agriculture in Washington DC "and experiment stations across the United States and Canada". (Pringle, 2008, page 308)

Harry V. Harlan was now the Director of the US Barley program in Washington DC. Early on, he decided to keep his family involved in his work. His older son, Bill, was very bright and liked to read. As this author was growing up, he heard, more than one, that his Uncle Bill read the entire Encyclopedia Britannica from cover to cover – twice. And this author believes that his Uncle Bill remembered practically everything he read. He was always apt to quote some fact just like he was reading it out of the encyclopedia. The younger boy, Jack, even brighter, seemed more interested in the stories his father would bring home from the office and field. The following conversation is conjecture, but something like this could well have happened. One day in 1921 Harry came home from work and at the dinner table said: "Boys, your father met a really important person at work, today." He said the following very slowly, knowing that it was going to be a mouthful: "His name is Nikolai Ivanovich Vavilov. He is from Russia and he is a plant explorer." Bill was taking this in, while playing with his soup, but young Jack, now only 4 years old, looked up and asked: "A plant

2 "A formal state of war between the two sides persisted for another seven months, until the signing of the [Treaty of Versailles](#) with Germany on 28 June 1919". (Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I#Armistices_and_capitulations. Open links in new windows.

explorer? What's a plant explorer?" Harry said: "Son, a plant explorer is a man who goes out all over the world and finds new and rare plants. That's what your Dad does. I am a plant explorer, too." This sparked something in young Jack and he said: "When I grow up, I'm going to be a Plant Explorer, too!" (My father told me many times, probably because I could not decide what to do with myself: "You know, son, I decided what I was going to do when I grew up by the time I was four years old." He was four in 1921 and that seems to be when Harry met Nikolai, so the above conversation, while factious, could very well have taken place. (HVH2)

From that day on until the end of his life Jack R. Harlan was to follow primarily in the footsteps of these two great men who wanted to do much: Nikolai Ivanovich Vavilov and Harry Vaughn Harlan.

The following is also conjecture; however, something like the following may have happened: HVH & NIV met in Harlan's office in 1921. They went out to the experimental plots and were conversing in English (Vavilov was fluent in several languages). HVH tells NIV that his interest was in Barley and NIV says "Well, you know, barley has a center of origin in Ethiopia and if you go there you can find a lot of really ancient varieties and a great deal of different kinds of barley genes (what today we might call 'genetic diversity')." This was how HVH got the idea to go to Abyssinia and he made the journey in 1923. NIV will follow him there in 1926. Harry and Nikolai became good friends at this first meeting in 1921. It is quite probable that there was an unspoken, friendly, contest, agreed upon with a friendly nod of the head, in 1921, to see who could get to Abyssinia first.

The Ethiopian Expedition of 1923

A year later, as Harry was planning his first real plant expedition to Spain, Abyssinia (Ethiopia), North Africa (Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) and India, he decided to take his family along. This was partially encouraged by Jack's enthusiastic and expressed desire to become a plant explorer and the trip had a tremendous impact on young Jack. Harry had been overseas several times, but what lay ahead was a major exploration into a land that had been visited by very few people from the outside world: Abyssinia (Later known as Ethiopia). Back at his office, Harry planned the trip. He wanted to be in Abyssinia during the barley harvest season, when barley plants would be in seed. The side trip to India needed to be during the spring or early summer. It looked

like the best thing to do would be to go to Spain first, leaving Gussie and the boys somewhere in France and then go to Africa. If he could get out of Africa by early 1924, there would be about a month to be with the family while the boys were still in school. Then he would go do the India part of the journey and return to France. The family would then return to the US, together.

That night he presented his plan to Gussie, who began to object - first, to them being gone from home so long and then, him leaving her and the boys in France for 6 months - alone - without him. "Do they speak English in France?" "Well, some of them probably do ... it will be great for Bill and Jack to grow up in another culture, don't you think?" "Well, I just don't know how I am going to manage in some strange country and I don't even speak their language ... while you go caravanning all over Africa."

Harry had to back up and regroup. "Mrs. Harlan, how would you like to tour Spain for a month?" Her face lit up a little bit. "When is this going to happen?" "Well, we go to Paris first and get the boys in a school, so that they can start learning French. I have to go to a few places in Europe to get things set up for the African part of the trip, but I will come by and see you between side trips. When the school year is over, I could get you and the boys settled in a little fishing village on the coast of France. Once we get settled in and the boys are secure, we can go to Spain for a month. We can rent a car and just drive around Spain, just you and me. You and I could have a second honeymoon!" Gussie was smiling now. "When we get back, I will go to Abyssinia, then come back to France in, let's say March of '24." Harry had hit a home run off the cuff. He had improvised something that won the endorsement of the most important person in his life: his wife. The next day, when he went back to the office and tried to work out the details, he realized that he could not really tie up everything just yet, but he had to remain somewhat flexible; but he knew that as they went along, they would get help from the local people and the trip would work out. The important thing was to get to the various areas when the barley crop was in seed and to keep his wife happy.

Plans were finalized, passports obtained, and the Harlan family sailed to France in February 1923 on the *US Van Buren*. They arrived in England in two weeks, took the ferry to France, took the train to Paris and got the boys in a French school right away. Bill remembered that the school was named: "Ecole D'Assase". It was near the Luxembourg Gardens. Bill was placed in third grade and

Jack was enrolled in kindergarten. They finished up the school year 1922-23 in Paris. Much of the following was taken from Bill's autobiography, *Looking back on my life*; however, Jack remembered an incident from this period which he related to this author about a dinner they were having with a Madame Destres, whom they had met in Paris: "There was a daughter of Madame Destres, Christine. She was 6. I was not quite 6 ... still 5, I guess. Anyway, somebody at the dinner table asked for a show of hands and ours came up together. I'm sure she was holding my hand. I was too bashful to hold hers."

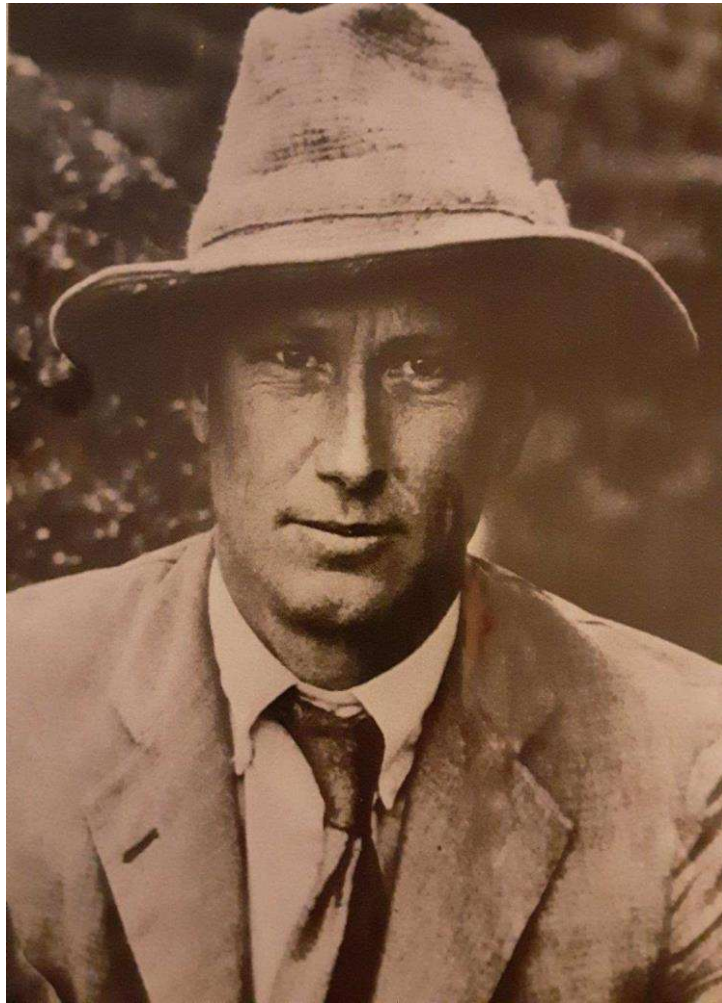
When summer came, Madame Detres suggested that they spend the summer in Pornic on the Brittany coast, as she had a summer home there. Brittany is on the west (Atlantic) coast of France. This they did and the boys spent the summer on the beach catching small shrimp. After Harry and Gussie saw that their sons would be safe with the mademoiselle of the Pension and their new friend, Madam Detres, staying in her summer house nearby, Harry kept his promise to Gussie and took her on the Spanish leg of the trip. As they toured around Spain, Harry kept his eyes open for rare barley plants and the car would stop at the most unexpected times. Gussie could not complain about the unplanned stops, but just kept enjoying the scenery. Meanwhile, back in Pornic, the Harlan boys would bring the shrimp they caught on the beach to the mademoiselle of the Pension and she would cook them up for their supper each night. When they returned to Pornic Harry noted that both boys were becoming quite proficient in the French language. Gussie was learning it, too. Brittany was not very convenient to Africa, however, so Harry sought a pension on the southern coast of France. At the end of the summer, they said "au revoir" to the good people of Pornic in Brittany and took a train to Paris and then another train to Menton on the Mediterranean coast near the border with Italy. Before they reached Menton, Harry departed the train to begin his trip to Abyssinia, leaving Gussie to figure the rest of it out - by herself. But he was confident in his wife to manage all this and in his two children to behave themselves.



Bill and a friend fishing on the beach in France.



The Harlan Family in France, 1923



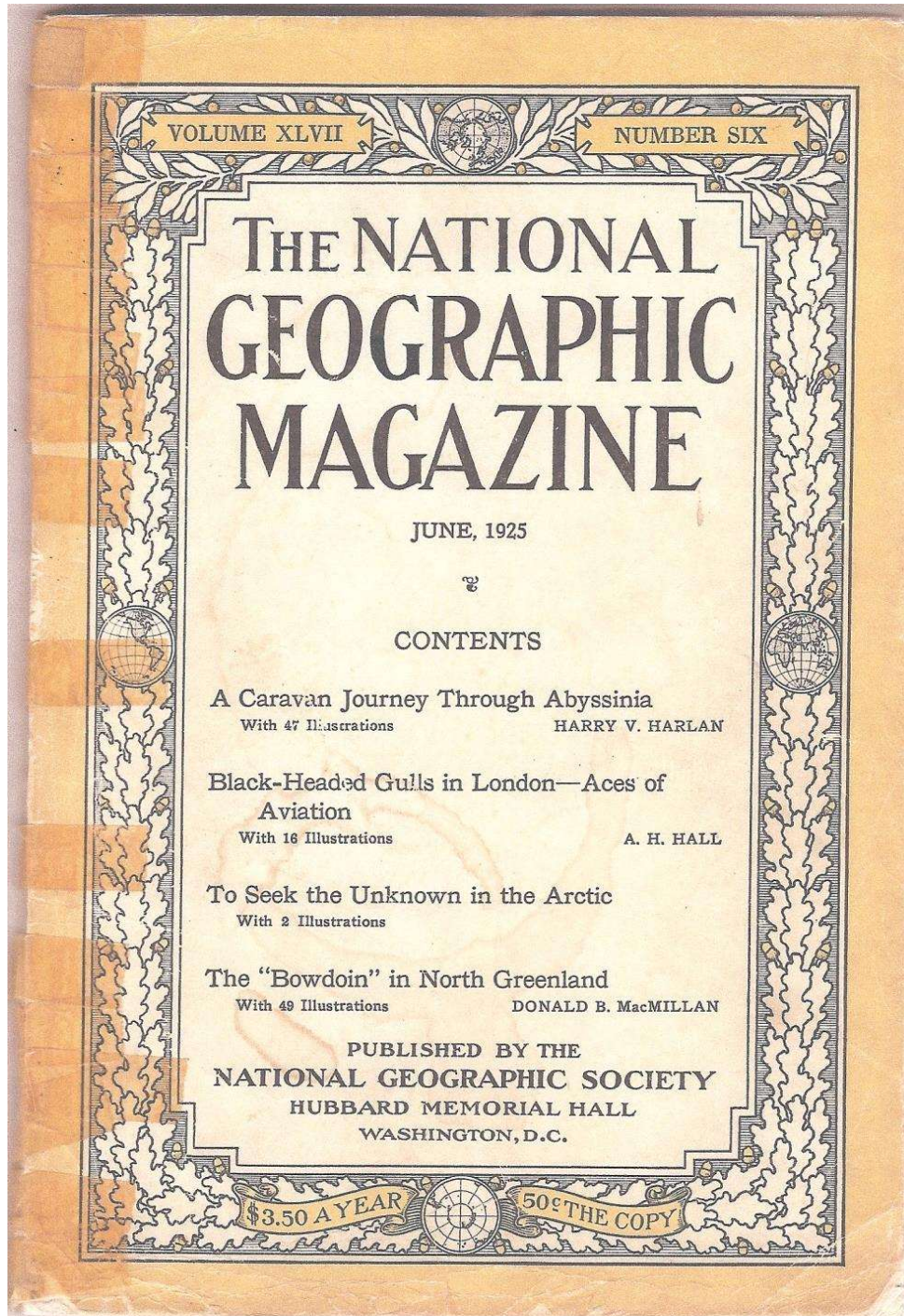
Harry V. Harlan, 1923 in France & Ethiopian Expedition

So, Bill and Jack Harlan spent school year 1923-24 in Menton, France. They lived in a pension in a fishing village. The boys' mastery of French increased. Gussie did great. The boys had a wonderful

time and, frankly, so did she. Harry was a very rugged, good looking young man. He looked like a movie star and now he was off in some primitive African country making history. These were great days. Bill and Jack would benefit from this year and a half abroad their entire lives. Bill was now in fourth grade and Jack was in first grade. Menton was remarkably close to the Italian border. Jack related the following story:

Menton was close enough that we walked over there for a picnic or something ... I supposed they picked it because it was something of a backwater, low key place compared to Monte Carlo or something like that. And it still is. I visited the place 2 or 3 years ago (1994) and it's still a backwater, very low key, just about as I remembered it. My mother rented the downstairs of a house for us and the house is still there, the garden where my brother and I used to play is still there. There was a path that went by the garden and up some cobblestone steps up on a ridge to a monastery in those days. And we could see, I suppose, they were Franciscans, they had long robes and the rope around the waist and so on. On the last visit (1994), the monks had gone but the monastery is there with an open chapel for anyone who wants to go in to worship. The place hasn't changed very much in all these years.

When Harry returned from the Africa leg of the trip, the boy's school year was not yet finished, so they decided to keep Bill and Jack in school in France until the end of the school year in May of 1924. Harry's return from Africa came with a nasty case of malaria, which he thought he picked up in Egypt. There was a doctor in Menton who treated him, and he was soon back on his feet, albeit a bit wobbly. Harry then went on the India leg of this expedition and returned in the spring for a few days before journeying back to the US. Harry arrived in the US on March 17, 1924. Before he left France, it was agreed that Gussie and the boys would visit Italy on their way home. This may have been a reward for doing so well in the French pensions. The expedition to Ethiopia would appear in the June 1925 edition of National Geographic Magazine: *A Caravan Journey through Abyssinia*. This author's personal copy shown below:



After school was over in May, Gussie and the boys began their journey home. They took a ship from Marseilles, France to Naples, Italy. There they had a few days to explore around and went to Pompeii, Vesuvius and Capri. The ship then went to Palermo, Sicily. They then headed for the Straits of Gibraltar. When Jack, now nearly 7, saw the coast of Africa he decided that he would go there someday. They arrived back in the US on July 4, 1924. This trip put the traveling bug into both Bill & Jack. As it turned out this early experience in France had a tremendous impact on the Harlan boys. They returned to the States as fluent French speakers. Their mother was also somewhat fluent in the French language. Jack never forgot the French he learned in those years. Later he would learn Spanish, German and Russian, but French was a language which he learned from the ground up, not in the classroom. Later in life, he could start a sentence in English and finish it in French or vice versa. He was able to give entire lectures in French with little or no notes.

Back in DC

During the following fall (1924), in DC, Harry and Gussie found a French speaking school for the boys. According to Bill “Two elderly sisters who were French ran it. About half the classes were conducted in English and half in French.” (Bill Harlan’s bio., 2006, page 45) Jack entered the 3rd grade & Bill entered the 5th grade. Notice that there was now only two years separating the two boys. Jack always said that he skipped the second grade, and this would be when he did that. Let’s let Jack tell the story:

We came back to the United States and my folks thought it would be good for both my brother and me to keep up with the French. So, there was a French school in Washington, and they enrolled us in this school. And the mistress in charge of it looked at me and said: “He’s just too big for second grade; we’ll put him in 3rd grade.” She did that. Well, I had problems ... I was a grade ahead of where I really should have been. The 3rd grade readers didn’t come so we had 4th grade readers and I had to learn to read out of that one. It was kind of a rough winter ... working around this with my mother ... slowly, slowly, slowly, I caught on; I learned to read.

Jack always told his children that he learned to read French before he learned to read English. So, this seems to be how that happened. Back in those days in DC, Bill and Jack went to public Junior High school from the French school and then on to public High School. In reflecting on those years, Jack said that Bill was a bully. He would pick fights with anyone willing to go in with him. He and Jack fought a certain amount, until Jack finally beat Bill and that ended the inter-family skirmishes. One year there was a classmate in Jr. High School who liked to fight with the other boys and he began to try to pick a fight with Jack. A time and a place were set on the playground. A crowd of students gathered, and the two contenders got ready. When they came into the ring, the other fellow asked Jack if he wanted to fight and Jack said “No.” “Well, I don’t either,” the young fellow replied and the two went off arm in arm and there was a great disappointment on that playground.

In High School Jack got on the school rifle team. “Saturdays we’d go down to the high school and practice. Then, across the street was kind of a general-purpose store that sold French apple pie. It was an apple pie with some frosting on it. Very sweet and a terrible diet. Anyway, we would get a pie and divide it up and eat it. And since the day was still young, we’d walk down the hill to the Potomac River and rent some canoes, go paddling up or down the Potomac River. But the French apple pie was a must. Terrible stuff!” (From taped conversation, 1996)

Nikolai Vavilov conducted a plant expedition to Afghanistan in 1924 and in 1926 he conducted an “Expedition to Abyssinia. He also visited North Africa, the Middle East, and Mediterranean countries.” (Pringle, 2008, page 308-09) Harry beat Nikolai to Abyssinia by three years (1923 vs. 1926). The point is they both went to Abyssinia. Why go there? Of all the countries in the world, Abyssinia was one of the most difficult to enter and navigate through. Harry must have started planning his trip right after the meeting in 1921. It would take about two years to organize such an undertaking, to get funding and logistics and transportation and everything it takes to do something like this. The funding came from National Geographic Society. Meanwhile, Vavilov was contending with a host of difficulties and opportunities in Russia that could have slowed down his progress toward Abyssinia, so that Harlan, in the end, beat him by three years.

From the Ethiopian viewpoint, Ras Tafari (Haile Selassie), the Prince Regent of Abyssinia and future Emperor of Ethiopia, was now reviewing a parade of scientists from great countries coming to

his country to look at and collect seeds from his plants. What impact did this have on him? He always seemed to be open to new ideas and western innovations. Did these visits increase his interest in the modern outside world? Did the visit with Harry Harlan lay the groundwork for the establishment of the first real university in Ethiopia under the cooperation of Oklahoma State University in 1951? It is the belief of this author that it did have this impact on Ras Tafari.

Nikolai Vavilov, a rising star in Soviet Agronomy, organized “the First Soviet Congress of Genetics, Selection, and Plant and Animal Breeding” in Leningrad in 1929. It was tremendously successful and vaulted Vavilov toward the top of the Soviet agricultural bureaucracy. “Vavilov’s administrative responsibilities would be extended over a new all-encompassing Lenin Academy of Agriculture, based in Moscow, eventually giving him control of some 111 research institutes and 300 experimental stations across the Soviet Union.” (Pringle, 2008, page 114) Vavilov would, over the next few years, collect and store a vast number of crop seeds from around the world. He sent out an army of collectors. His main mission in doing this was to avert the frequent food shortages which seemed to dog the Soviet Union, in spite of its idealistic socialist programs.

By comparison, as Harry Harlan wrote in *One Man’s Life with Barley*: “After two years of graduate work at Kansas State, I joined the Agriculture Department, working first for David Fairchild, and then Mark Carleton. I was assigned to barley, which to my knowledge, I had not seen before. Three years later I was, and still am, head of the barley project. We made experts quickly in those days. Of course, it was not quite an institution that I was made head of. The staff consisted of me. The facilities were of a larger sort. The field men of the office, stationed mostly west of the Mississippi, were supposed to plant anything I wanted grown. They did this for all project leaders.” (*One Man’s Life with Barley*, page 4) One may well wonder if Nikolai Vavilov had any idea of the vast difference in size of the operations for which his American friend, Harry Harlan, was in charge compared to his own.

Something else began in 1928 that was very significant. Harry Harlan had established experimental Barley plots in Arizona, near Sacaton and in Idaho, in the shadow of the Saw Tooth Mountains. For a number of summers (and at this point in time, it is a little hard to determine exactly how many) the Harlan family would drive the Buick out west so that Harry could supervise the

harvest. Let us let Bill Harlan describe the first adventure out west. “In 1928 when we went west for the first time, I entered the high school at Casa Grande, Arizona, which was 14 miles south of Sacaton where we lived. The school bus consisted of a pickup truck with fold up benches in back. This was for the four or five boys. The two girls rode in front with Poncho, the driver, a Pima Indian. He also carried mail and some groceries for the trading post. The largest item was a large carton of fresh bread, which was usually tied to the front fender.” (Bill Harlan’s bio. page 45) In 1928 Jack was 11 years old. On this trip they took the southern route to Arizona, stopped by New Orleans and saw the brown mud lines left over from the great flood of 1927 (*ibid*, page 85). This flood was described in the 1998 book, *Rising Tide*, by John M. Barry.

After the barley plots were set up in Arizona and Idaho, Harry established a routine in which he would return to Arizona in February and be there until the harvest in early May, then go to Idaho and be there for the harvest in August. Then he would return home to DC having been away from home six months out of the year.

Harry also started a grand Barley experiment in 1928, at the University of California at Davis. Jack put it this way in 1996:

This study is still going on after all these years. He (Harry) took ... he selected very carefully. Looking back on it I am very impressed by his selection of varieties. At the outset he took 28 varieties, crossed them in all possible combinations. That’s something like 385, I don’t know, you can figure it out: 2 by 2 crosses, He made all these crosses and the F2 he mixed them as best he could and sent samples to several experiment stations around the country. Some grew them for a while, some didn’t. Anyway, Davis, California took this thing seriously and they have now grown this for some, it must be over 70 generations by now. The last I knew was 65 or so. Anyway, year by year this mixed population has changed, has evolved. It is an experiment in plant evolution. These changes have been monitored. It stated out at first in just, oh, gross morphology: they had 2-row and 6-row, grains that were white, red, black, awned, awnless, rough-awn, smooth-awn and so on. The thing was to let nature do its course, harvested in bulk, panted in bulk, year after year. And the thing has changed remarkably over the years. And one thing of interest: the yield has increased over the years at about 95% of the rate of the best that plant breeders could do – with no effort at all. It has been evolving into a land race adapted

to Davis, California. A whole lot of analyses have been made: what increased the yield? It is mostly seeds per plant, not larger seeds but seeds per plant. The morphology has moved towards a rather compact inflorescence, the stature is fairly short. It is a matter of partitioning of the plant production into grain, stem or leaves. And the partitioning has moved automatically in the direction of grain. So anyway this has been an extraordinary interesting experiment and it is still going on. It was started in 1928.

Writing about this study Allard, et al (1992) stated that “CCII was synthesized in 1928 by pooling equal numbers of F2 seeds obtained by selfing F1 hybrid plants derived from the 378 possible pairwise intercrosses among 28 barley cultivars chosen to represent all of the major barley growing areas of the world (HARLAN and MARTINI, 1929) found on-line in “Evolution of Multilocus Genetic Structure in an Experimental Barley Population.”

JRH meets NIV

In 1930 young Jack, now 13 years old, had an especially important encounter with Nikolai Vavilov. Peter Pringle reports: “In the fall of 1930, Nikolai Ivanovich attended two international conferences of agronomists, one in Ithaca, New York, and the other in Washington, D. C.” (Pringle, 2008, page 160) From Jack Harlan’s book *Living Fields* we learn that because of the friendship between Harry and Nikolai which began in 1921, NIV stayed in the Harlan guest room while in Washington while on his 1930 visit to Washington DC. The following is taken from *The Living Fields*:

I would see him (NIV) at breakfast and again in the evening when he and my father sat in our living room and regaled each other with the adventures and mishaps of plant collecting. Vavilov never missed an opportunity to learn: my mother chased him out of the kitchen because he was asking so many questions; she could not keep her mind on her cooking. One evening my father came home from work and said that he and Vavilov were going to make a field trip next day and would I like to go along? Of course, the answer was an enthusiastic “Yes”. It seems that Vavilov wanted a sample of American wild rice, *Zizania aquatica*, to take back to USSR. We drove to the Patuxent river wetlands, one of the best on the east coast and now protected by the Patuxent Wildlife Refuge. We were going

to collect in American Indian style. My father rented a rowboat, instead of a canoe, and had a canvas shock cover, which we spread over the bow. Vavilov insisted on rowing: his intense energy would not permit him to be a passive. He rolled up his sleeves and propelled the boat with vigor into the massive stands of wild rice; I would bend stalks over the canvas sheet with one stick and beat the panicles with another, following the American Indians' method of harvesting wild rice. We soon had a good collection, but Vavilov was curious about everything.

There were large flocks of birds in the marsh and, as he had noted I had an interest in birds, he asked me what they were. "They are bobolinks", I told him. "You have a bird book. Let me see," he said. True, I had a little pocket paper book: this was long before Petersen's guides were available. I showed him the picture and description. He looked at the Latin name *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*. "Do you know what that means?" he asked. I had had some Latin but had to confess I did not. "*Oryzivorus* means rice eater", he explained. I thought "Wow! Those funny names really mean something!" I have been dealing with those funny names ever since, but Vavilov was the first to open my eyes. We did not know then, and it was many years before we found out, that the seed of *Zizania aquatica* has a very high moisture content and if it dried out it dies. Vavilov took home a couple of kilos of dead seed. (Harlan, *Living Fields*, page 52)

The Harlan family returned to Arizona and /or Idaho each summer for the next several years. The boys would scour the Arizona desert near Sacaton looking for arrowheads. As they grew older, they worked in their father's fields for 35 cents an hour, until the locals complained that these boys from out of state were getting all the work and Harry let the locals do the work his boys had been doing.

It was around this time, on the Idaho phase, that Jack would go off on week-long solitary hikes across the countryside. He told this author about this on numerous occasions as he was growing up. Jack would leave on a Monday, with his backpack on his back and go off in a certain direction, making a campfire each night at a different place, cooking his evening meal and sleeping under the stars at night. He would complete the circuit and return to the ranch on Friday or Saturday, take a shower and go to the Saturday night dance, rest up the next day and set out on Monday in a different direction. This seems almost impossible now, but Jack Harlan told this story many times, so it must

be true. It was this kind of self-reliance and ability to really “rough it” which allowed Jack Harlan to complete so many overseas expeditions in his career, most of which were done solo.

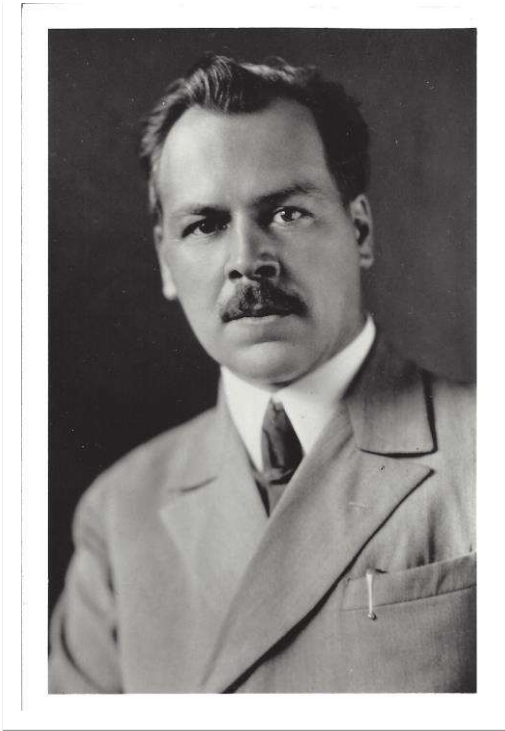


Jack Harlan about 14 years old

Vavilov visited Washington again in 1932. In his biography (page 57), Bill Harlan says: “On Vavilov’s last visit, Dad had had a heart attack and was not available to go around town so I served as a guide.” Jack said that NIV stayed in their house on both the 1930 and the ‘32 visit and does not mention his father having a heart attack. At any rate, if HVH did have a mild heart attack prior to Vavilov’s visit, he may have had to stay in bed while Bill drove NIV around, but Nikolai could have stayed at his house during this visit. Bill graduated from High School in DC in 1932. He enrolled in George Washington University, in Washington DC and would go on to graduate in 1936.

In those days Harry would drive from Washington DC to Arizona in the Spring and then, after the harvest drive to Idaho. Jack told his son, Richard, that one year, when he had gotten his driver’s

license his father had him drive the family car from DC to Arizona. This was a very educational experience for the young man.



Dr. Nikolai I. Vavilov, 1932



Cadet Jack R. Harlan, 1931

A rare photo (below) from the Griffing side of Jack Harlan's family with some visitors:



This photograph was taken about 1934. Sitting at left are Gussie Harlan, Minnie and Ward Griffing. In front of them are Minnie and Ward's two boys, Dick (born in 1927) and Billy (born in 1922). Standing in back is Ward's twin brother Willis Griffing. Standing at right are (left to right), Harry Harlan, and sons Bill (20 years old) and Jack (17 years old). Gussie, Ward & Willis were siblings. Another sibling, May, died in 1912. This photograph was taken in front of Ward and Minnie Griffing's farmhouse in the Blue River Valley north of Manhattan, Kansas. (Photo and text provided by Cousin Griff Griffing and captioned by HVH2)

Jack graduated from High School in DC in 1934 at age 17. He enrolled in George Washington University (GW) that fall. This author's parents always called it "GW" and I will continue in that tradition. Jack knew what he was after. He had known for a long time that he wanted to be a scientist and a plant explorer. Bill was not as sure what he was going to do with himself. He was vaguely following in his father's footsteps, but his steps were just not as sure as Jack's. Harry and Jack began planning Jack's career early. They both wanted Jack to attend graduate school at the University of Leningrad and study under Nikolai Vavilov. Therefore, when Jack selected courses for his first semester at GW he enrolled in Russian. He would take Russian the first four semesters at George Washington.

While at GW, Jack proved himself to be a superior student. He demonstrated his intelligence and direction. Many students come to college not knowing what they want to do with their lives, or what they want to get out of the college education. Jack was different. He entered GW because he wanted to become a plant explorer and to do that one needed to receive a good education. He knew that after four years at GW he would go to graduate school. He knew that how well he did in his undergraduate education would determine what kind of graduate school he could be admitted to. Thus, Jack Harlan had several reasons to avoid the foolish activities of many of his peers and concentrate on his education. He lived at home, took the bus to the campus every day and remained on campus until he returned home on the bus in the evening.

Jack allowed himself one extracurricular activity: rifle. He joined the college rifle team and developed his skills which had been started in High School, and he began to excel. Jack liked the intense concentration of the 22-caliber rifle – prone position. He began to win tournaments and became captain of his rifle team. He eventually won the national intercollegiate title for prone position and his team placed first in national intercollegiate competition in 1938.

Jack's choice of study at GW was Botany. He felt that at the undergraduate level he should build up a good foundation in the basics of plant anatomy, taxonomy and physiology. In graduate school he could concentrate on specific problems or groups of plants that he found interesting. Jack did very well at GW. He was elected, along with 12 other GW students, to be the founders of the Phi

Bill had finished his course work for the Doctor of Philosophy degree. All he had left to do was write his thesis. The plan was to concentrate on that task in the school year 1938-39. He would then graduate, but then what? The national economy was still struggling, and many men were still out of work. What good would it do for him to finish his PhD if all it meant was that he would have to stand in a soup line or work for the WPA making park benches? Then, out of nowhere, knowledge of an interesting job opening for a teaching position in a high school in Kabul, Afghanistan appeared. Bill tells the story in his biography, *Looking Back on my Life*.

One evening, Dr. Griggs, the head of the Botany Department at George Washington University, came to Dad with a proposition. It seems that the Turkish ambassador had come to him with a problem. He had received a request from the government of Afghanistan to hire an American science teacher for the English-speaking school in Afghanistan. The Ambassador was the representative of Afghanistan in the U.S. but had no idea as to how he could find such a person so he went to Dr. Griggs, who was the only educated person of his acquaintance. Dr. Griggs was wondering if I might be interested. Diplomatic arrangements were rather different then than they are now. The official U.S. representative in Afghanistan was the minister in Persia, who had never been there. Hence the roundabout arrangements. (Bill Harlan's bio., page 116)

Bill now had a job offer. Not only did it pay more than he was expecting to receive upon graduation with his PhD, but it was in Afghanistan, a country he had read about and about which he was fascinated. Taking this job would fulfill several of young Bill Harlan's life goals: to be out on his own, to go to some far-flung country and to use his training in science. He jumped at the chance. A great burden had been lifted from his shoulders and that of his parents; and he left the United States in 1938 without finishing his PhD thesis. Whereas he would return to the US on occasion, Bill Harlan continued to live overseas, working for the US government as an agricultural advisor, and to a sedentary life in Spain and Ireland after retiring in 1969, until he finally returned to the US in 1986; some 48 years after leaving. Bill (Wilbur) Vaughn Harlan died November 29, 2006, at the good old age of 92 in Corvallis, Oregon and is buried at the Veterans Cemetery in Corvallis.

Several especially important events took place while Jack Harlan was at GW. The most important was his meeting a beautiful young student and daughter of his Botany teacher. Jean Yocum would become the love of his life. To find out more, please read the next Chapter.