

## Henry Knowles Beecher--His Life in Part

### *The Kansas Years*

#### ■ Introduction

In a Faculty of Medicine Memorial Minute published 18 months after Beecher's death, no fewer than eight authors, among the most celebrated medical academicians of their generation, ruefully concluded that no obituary could catch Harry "all told; he was too big a man." Twice, they cut short their efforts, deferring in one instance to the need for "the services of a thorough biographer," in another to that of "a dedicated biographer."<sup>1</sup> Some 30 years later, there has been no biographer of record, certainly no one who pretends to thoroughness, and no one who has taken Beecher "all told." In print, he has been variously described as a scholar, a perfectionist, showman, colleague and mentor, an aristocrat, a populist, whistle-blower, contrarian. Off the record, and always with a nod of approval to his Herculean achievements in various fields, he has, alas, been called far worse. Lost in this mild ferment has been the simple fact that the famous professor of the 1950s and 1960s—the subject of many reminiscences and, more recently, increasingly insightful critical appraisals—was not always so very famous.

At 25, he was on the move, but the move hadn't yet crystallized and there is much to suggest he was exceedingly lucky in crafting the persona by which the world would know him. He existed—a sociable if emotionally tightened youth, a precocious student, a conflicted young man, the victim of troubled family circumstances—as do we all, making the best of things, sometimes to good effect, sometimes not, sometimes with chilly efficiency, sometimes with redemptive charm. He was, as most, both burdened and relieved by adulthood. For longer, perhaps, than most people realize, his life was something of a work-in-progress, and, as much at times as he might have wanted to, he did not spring, fully-formed, from the womb.

His early years are usually glossed with little more than a mistaken-laden paragraph or two. How in fact did this son of Henry Eugene and Mary Julia Unangst become Professor Henry K. Beecher, M.D., the marked man about whom controversy swirled unendingly, whose achievements, arguably among the most profound of his time, reached deeply into his field and into that of medical science generally? What of his formative years, his family life, what of the whistle-stop railroad and farming community of Peck, Kansas in which he grew up? How did he find his way to the University of Kansas and then to Harvard Medical School? There will never be a definitive Beecher, but we can at last flesh out his early years and shed some light on the colorful if confounding stories that sometimes greet us still.

## ■ Harry

In a delightful attempt at mythopoesis, Dr. Claude E. Welch, writing in *The New England Journal of Medicine* (23 September 1976), memorialized his late classmate from Harvard Medical School's Class of 1932: "In 1928 Harry, a young Lochinvar riding out of the west from the Kansas prairies, entered Harvard Medical School to establish a career and a profile most aptly described by the late Grantley Taylor, who termed him the 'last Elizabethan.'"

Where to begin? The reference is to the gallant Lochinvar, the hero of a poem by Sir Walter Scott:

O young Lochinvar is come out of the west,  
Through all the wide Border his steed was the best;  
And save his good broadsword he weapons had none.  
He rode all unarm'd, and he rode all alone.  
So faithful in love, and so dauntless in war,  
There never was knight like the young Lochinvar.

Harry might or might not have been an incarnation, in laboratory garb, of young Lochinvar, his "good broadsword" the well-chewed pencil with which he went about the agonizing work of readying his papers for publication. Assuredly, he was man of qualities, of talents, of special insights, of expansive sensibilities and a breadth of interest unmeasured by ordinary standards, but an Elizabethan? No, the *last* Elizabethan. What was good Lochinvar seeking?

But ere he alighted at Netherby gate,  
The bride had consented, the gallant came late;...  
*His* bride!—and he, nearly too late to the party:  
For a laggard in love, and a dastard in war,  
Was to wed the fair Ellen of brave Lochinvar.

(*Marmion; A Tale of Flodden Field*, 1808)

Fair but feather-brained Ellen—promised to Lochinvar, bewitched in his absence by a laggard in love, a dastard in war. The young knight hits Netherby in the nick of time and forthwith sweeps her up.

Needless to say, Dr. Welch is flying a bit high, though he does have his reasons. Beecher's ability, he continues, "already proved by an M.A. degree, and a driving energy were maintained throughout his life. Within a few months [of starting medical school], in addition to his regular studies, he carried out sophisticated experiments in Dr. Cohen's physiology laboratory."<sup>iii</sup> The reference is, in the end, an endearing one, if for one reason only. Jonathan Beecher, Harry's eldest, in a personal reminiscence that dates to 1977,<sup>iii</sup> a time when he and his two sisters were understandably interested in gathering information about their father's life, writes, "Dad told me once how he came to go to Harvard Medical School. He wanted to become a great chemist and believed he should do graduate work at the Sorbonne. He went to Boston in the late '20s, partly to get information about studying in Paris, partly also

in pursuit of a girl.” Harry, it now appears, might also have been flying a bit high with this fanciful story, but Harry by all accounts loved a good story and was not above chuckling or grouching his way into or out of one.

Thumbnail sketches of Beecher note with wearisome regularity that he assumed his duties as chief of the anesthesia services at the Massachusetts General Hospital in 1936 at the age of 32; only four years out of medical school, he had had a few years of surgical training and a fellowship year in the Copenhagen laboratory of the distinguished chemist and Nobel laureate August Krogh. The son of a tradesman and laborer from rural Kansas, he had attended the University of Kansas at Lawrence, taking an A.B. in Chemistry in 1926 and an A.M. a year or two later. Reticent about his Kansas past, he traveled east to Harvard, changing his name in the process. Born Harry Unangst, he had adopted the surname Beecher....—And so on, his later achievements clearly trumping interest in what came before. The lapse is both puzzling and regrettable, for there is much to be learned from family archives, published histories of the places in which he lived, academic profiles that date to his high school years in Wichita, Kansas, and Phoenix, Arizona, his life and times at the University of Kansas, a little-known year spent teaching at tiny Highland (Kansas) College, documents of record from various sources, and both his personal and professional papers held by the Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine at Harvard Medical School. It is to these we now turn in taking our measure of the man.

Henry Knowles Beecher, M.D., the eminent professor, scholar, and scientist, the arch anesthetist who helped transform and ultimately transcended his field—Grantley Taylor’s “last Elizabethan,” Dr. Welch’s “Lochinvar”—was born Harry Knowles Unangst in Wichita, Kansas on 4 February 1904, the second of three children of Henry Eugene Unangst (1868-1957) and Mary (Kerley) Unangst (1869-1926). Their first child, Eugene, born in 1901, died in infancy, and their third child, Ruth, was born on 24 August 1912.<sup>iv</sup> Unofficial sources sometimes note Peck, Kansas (about 15 miles south of Wichita) as Harry’s birthplace, but he was almost surely born in Wichita.<sup>v</sup> That it is at least likely that Henry Eugene and his expectant wife Mary turned to Wichita has partly to do with the fact that Henry Eugene’s younger sister Alice—working as a waitress and residing at 250 North Topeka Street—was living there at the time and could easily provide lodging.<sup>vi</sup> Home births were not uncommon in turn-of-the-century prairie towns such as Peck and even Wichita. There is a family belief, however, that Mary delivered in a hospital (perhaps insuring a degree of care absent in the loss of her firstborn). If she did, the Wichita Hospital (formerly the Ladies’ Benevolent Home and Hospital), less than half a mile from Alice’s home, would likely have been the venue.<sup>vii</sup> (The state did not require that birth certificates be issued or registered at the time; we have none for Harry.) Though the son of Henry and Mary would eventually abandon the diminutive “Harry” in favor of the stalwart “Henry” in more formal circumstances (and in much of his correspondence), Harry was his given name and that by which friends addressed him throughout his life; it was the name he

preferred in casual encounters with his colleagues and, to their occasional surprise, his residents, students, and laboratory assistants.

Henry Eugene Unangst and Mary Julia Kerley had been married in Peck, Kansas on 23 January 1899, the Reverend Marcellus Piatt of the Council Hill Christian Church officiating.<sup>viii</sup> They were just about the same age, had both, with their respective families, settled on the Kansas plains after leaving the farmlands of Illinois, and had come of age in the rural way station and watering stop of two major railroad lines. Kerleys and Unangsts were plentiful. Members of the extended Kerley family reside there still; the Unangsts are all but forgotten.

## ■ The Unangst Family

David B. Unangst, Henry Eugene's father and Harry's grandfather, was born about 1832<sup>ix</sup> in Northampton County, Pennsylvania, the landscape of which was peppered with unrelated Unangsts, many *Davids* and *Henrys* among them (for which reason establishing a genealogy of record is a difficult matter indeed). At 18, he was living with the family of a Jacob Stetler in the town of Montgomery, working as a laborer. By 1859, the year of his marriage to Martha Knowles (1837-1889), originally from New Jersey, he was living in Logan, in the County of Rush Creek, Ohio, where he worked as a shoemaker and presumably lived quite modestly. In 1880, we find him in Coles County, Illinois working as a farmer and raising a family of six children (four girls and two boys), the fourth of whom, Henry Eugene, born 6 July 1868, was by that time eleven years old (a seventh child, Gertrude, was born shortly thereafter). At some point during the 1880s, the family set off for Salem Township, in Sedgwick County, Kansas, eventually acquiring a farm of 154 acres a little over a mile east of what was to become the town center of the as-yet unplatted prairie town of Peck.

## ■ The Kerley Family

The Kerleys had also found their way to this region and were, in fact, among the earliest to set down roots in the area. On Harry's maternal side, we can reliably trace the family to his great grandparents, Hosea Rowe Kerley (1802-1879), a farmer in Vergennes, Vermont, and Mary (or Mariah) Beecher (1807-1885) of Kent, Connecticut. Married on 7 March 1827 in Kent, they had eleven children (four of whom died in infancy); David, their fifth, was born on 9 January 1835.<sup>x</sup> At 19, he moved from Vermont to Illinois, where, in 1864, he was commissioned and served with the Union forces in the 114<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry Regiment.<sup>xi</sup> David married, was widowed, and, in January 1861, married again, this time to Sarah Ann Elizabeth (or Eliza) Marshall (born in Virginia on 23 August 1835), with whom he had ten children; Mary Julia, their fifth child and first daughter, was born 10 February 1869. (Six of David's children, with families of their own, were to live at some point in Peck, Kansas.)

The 1880 Federal Census finds David and his family in Madison, Illinois; David, then 45, was working, as did his father in Vergennes, as a farmer. In the autumn of 1882, he moved to Kansas, pinpointing the Peck area as his destination. Doubtless the prospect of agrarian life in the newly opened Kansas territory drew him as it did so many others. He set up on a small farm, starting in a one-room cabin, about half a mile south and west of what would become the small town center; he built a second dwelling (one room up and one room down) when his family arrived the following spring. The house soon grew to eight rooms, contemporaneous photographs of which show the extended family gathered alongside it.<sup>xii</sup>

That the Kerleys of Illinois knew the Unangsts of Illinois before their respective moves to Kansas is unlikely, separated as they were by hundreds of miles (the Unangsts in Coles County, the Kerleys in Madison).<sup>xiii</sup> Though the Kerleys established themselves in Sumner County, the two families were near neighbors, the county line dividing the little township in half—Sedgwick to the north, Sumner to the south. Their paths likely crossed often and to a good end—most happily, the marriage of Henry Eugene to Mary Julia.

## ■ Henry Eugene Unangst and Mary Julia Kerley

The conditions under which the Unangst and Kerley families met and mingled in Peck can probably be figured with a fair degree of certainty, given how small the town was, how it was growing and its citizens joining to prepare for that growth. We do not have documentary evidence of social interactions, nor do we have diaries, journals, or correspondence to track the relationship. Further, we know nothing of Harry's parents' courtship. Both were young adolescents when their families arrived in Peck, both had probably already finished with much of their formal schooling, and both likely worked, at least at first, on the family farms, perhaps interacting socially at town gatherings and church meetings of one sort or another.

After the death of Mary Julia's father David in 1888, his wife Sarah, with at least three of their children (Mary Julia among them), stayed on at the farm, eventually moving into Peck proper in 1899, the year of Mary Julia's marriage to Henry Eugene Unangst; indeed, the marriage, which took Mary Julia from Sarah Kerley's household, might have been a factor in her move, with her son Joseph and daughter Etta, from the big family farmhouse. (Census information indicates that Sarah might actually have lived next door to her daughter and new son-in-law.)<sup>xiv</sup>

In 1889, just a year after Mary Julia had lost her father at the relatively early age of 53, Henry Eugene's mother Martha died at 52. Three years later, David Unangst—Henry Eugene's father—took as his second wife a Mrs. Sarah Baxter.<sup>xv</sup> At the time of his son's marriage seven years later, David was probably still working his farmstead (though he might already have moved locally, as later documents

sometimes suggest), the distance separating him from his son and new daughter-in-law in town no more than a mile or so.

On their marriage license, no occupation is listed for either Henry Eugene or Mary Julia. If the D.B. Unangst farm were a profitable enterprise generally, we have no record of it. Like most small farms, in fact, the returns were worth the investment to a limited extent only. At the time of their marriage, Henry Eugene was most likely pursuing local commercial interests and Mary Julia tending to matters at home. The residential and commercial center of town was a severe grid of three short north-south streets (identified by letter: D, C, and B) intersected by four east-west streets (identified as 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup>, the county line running through 7<sup>th</sup>). The newlyweds took up residence below 7<sup>th</sup> (hence, in Sumner County) in a small white frame house.<sup>xvi</sup>

We find ample evidence of Henry Eugene's likeable nature, a willingness to join in if not follow through, a jack-of-all-trades sensibility, and a man-about-town quality that probably brought opportunities of a sort. Whether or not he continued on in the D.B. Unangst household into his 20s is a point of conjecture. Anecdotal evidence indicates that he worked at a variety of jobs, but never as a farmer. In 1900, at 31 and a year and a half into his marriage, he was, according to Census reports, working as a salesman; in 1910, we have him as a merchant, perhaps at a sort of general store he and a man named Roll owned or managed.<sup>xvii</sup> At some point his father's property was rented out to others. In truth, we hear very little of David Unangst in succeeding years,<sup>xviii</sup> though a local newspaper notice, dated 22 July 1908, states that "D.B. Unangst near the Ninnescah River had a nice load of peaches and apples in Peck last Monday. Merchant Welte bought them for his customers"—evidence that, at 76, he was still engaged in quiet commerce from somewhere other than the family farm, the Ninnescah running south and west of Peck. How close young Harry was to his grandfather is unknown. Given the shared experiences of everyday life in small towns of the day, we have no reason to doubt that grandfather and grandson shared the crunch of an apple, the slurp of a peach, and probably much more. The ensuing years, however, were not particularly happy ones for the Henry E. Unangst family, at least as registered by Harry's experience. Peck had much to offer but, eventually, much to forget.

## ■ Peck, Kansas

Virtually every account of Beecher's life alludes to Peck, the impossibly distant little town that somehow gave Harry—not Harry exactly, but Professor Henry K. Beecher, the colossus Harry was to become—to a waiting world. That Peck has assumed an almost mythic quality in Beecher studies is a circumstance the man himself would undoubtedly have relished, given his occasional penchant for deflection and evasiveness in discussions of his family history. In 1910 Peck enjoyed its peak population of about 300; 75 years later that number had dwindled to under 100 and the town, to its remaining residents' amusement

and dismay—and perhaps to Harry’s as he smiled down upon them, some Kerley kinsfolk included—was officially listed as “lost” in the *Kansas Area Key to Sedgwick County*. Of course, it wasn’t lost then, nor need its history—for it does have an earthly history—be lost to us now.<sup>xix</sup>

Kansas in the 1880s was as likely a stopping off point as any for those drawn to farming and commerce, though we have nothing to indicate its special appeal to the Unangst and Kerley families, or to the many other Illinoisans who settled the area. Presumably, word spread that the land of the fertile south-midland prairies, until 1870 or so the home of the Osage Indians, was available to any who desired it and that the railroads, which began draping the area during Reconstruction, would bring trade on an enviable scale. In fact, Peck (named after George R. Peck, an official with the Santa Fe Railroad) was platted in 1887 by the Golden Belt Town Company of Peabody, Kansas. (Such companies, working in tandem with the railroads, bought large tracts of land and offered plots for sale at points where the trains would likely stop for business, refueling, and so on.) Peck, renowned for the softness of its water (a desirable quality in water at way stations and whistle stops) sat at the juncture of the Chicago, Kansas, and Nebraska (a subsidiary of the Rock Island Railroad Line) and the Atcheson, Topeka, and Santa Fe (the latter transecting David Unangst’s property, with what upset to farm life we do not know).

By the time young Harry Unangst was old enough to be out and about, he would have seen (and smelled) stockyards for hogs and cattle (two of his Kerley uncles had stockyards of their own), barns and stables, corncribs and wheat fields. He kicked along on wooden sidewalks past hitching posts and water troughs. The streets were unpaved, the horse and buggy traffic more trial than triumph, the quip of a whip, the jingling of harness bell marking the way. Like most, Harry sneezed out the rough dust of summer and mucked about in the winter mud. He might very well have climbed up into the barber’s chair of good Earl Grist (affectionately, and predictably, nicknamed “Baldy”). A Confectionary served up sandwiches (as its gas-powered engine froze the ice cream), a corner area housing the town’s sole switchboard. Among the deliveries to the grocer was a quarter ton of ice each week, most likely brought in by rail, there being little if any available for harvesting from local ponds in winter.

The town was well-outfitted with tradesmen, serving not only locals but also those at some distance. A hardware and equipment store marketed in stoves, wagons, buggies, harnesses, wire fencing, oils, water tanks, troughs, tin goods, and the like. There was a livery and drayage business (carts available to rent for trades-people arriving by rail to sell their wares in town), a garage and machine shop, a blacksmith, a milliner, a dry goods store (hats, caps, boots, shoes, groceries, flour, salt), feed stores, lumberyards, a milling company, two saloons, and even a small country inn. By 1900, the town featured a hotel, the Palace, located on C Street. (A building large enough for town dances and the like, it had been transported whole from a neighboring hamlet, re-roofed and painted green; its 24 rooms went for 25 cents per day and meals could be had for 15 cents). In 1905, one of the Kerleys, with a man named Roll (perhaps the same with whom Henry Eugene was linked), had built a 10,000-bushel grain elevator, hiring

threshers and corn shuckers, whose paths Harry might have crossed as they set up in town to work the crops. There were water towers, water treating tanks, a pump station, and a depot.

Reflecting the utilitarian bent of the town companies, house lots—including that of the Henry E. Unangst family—measured a uniform 25 by 140 feet, Peck’s commercial and residential center covering only about six to eight acres. Most houses—“pretty little homes set back in grassy yards,” some a bit more elegant with light Victorian touches —were small but functional. Outlying farmhouses, most all within an hour’s walk, came in all shapes and sizes, from pitched-roof cabins to the weathered, eight-room residence of the Kerley clan.

In overview, indications of municipal growth are immediately evident—the churches (the Council Hill Christian Church, the Church of Christ, and later the Methodist Church), the Peck School (a one room schoolhouse built in 1891, a second room added in 1903 as the population grew)<sup>xx</sup> and a formal School Board, the State Bank (established in 1901), the Peck Mutual Telephone Company (rural service having been acquired in August 1903), the Horse Company (one of its first purchases being an imported Percheron stallion—a powerful horse in heavy harness presumably offered for rent to farmers tilling pastures and fields—for at the staggering price of \$3,200), regular postal service (arriving during the 1890s and probably ensured by the railroad traffic) and so on—but there is no reason to think that life in Peck was much different from that in other such towns. That it acquired a sort of gladsome presence was probably assured by the crossing of the two great railroad lines, but there were good times and bad, and of a rougher texture than that generally captured by romanticized musings; there was no public library but no public constable and there never was need of a mayor or a board of city elders. Life quickened or slowed with the seasons, the mortgaged land a source of pride but also worry.

We learn more of Harry’s maternal than paternal line in scanning the soft Kansas hills and he likely did too. The ubiquitous Charles H. Kerley, one of his mother’s older brothers, sat by election on the first school board (as did his brother Joseph), was president of the State Bank, a member of the board of the Peck Mutual Telephone Company, and proprietor for a time of the Palace Hotel. One of the first postmasters (earning a salary of \$16.00 per month) was Joseph R. Kerley, also one of Harry’s uncles; by 1903, yet another Kerley relation was serving as mail carrier, a job important enough to command a wage of \$600.00 per year. Had Harry seen his own surname, it would have been on the commercial building named “Roll and Unangst” (just east of the Peck Bank), an establishment dealing in the sale of clothing, household goods, notions, and produce, Roll being a major player in such stock. This building (at some point referred to simply as the Roll Building) was a center of social activity. “Events included,” writes a biographer of the snappy little town, “community plays, dances, literaries and many oyster suppers with the soup being cooked in wash boilers.... At one point it was thought that the upstairs was used as a skating rink and a bowling alley.” However the storekeepers contrived to produce a skating rink, we can,



with far less effort, picture young Harry trying his hand (and feet) at such a sport. The sociable Henry Eugene was a regular.

Harry's take on all this is unknown. That, years later, he would refer to an early life, as his son Jonathan recollects, "in terms of broad images and stereotypes" doesn't argue forcefully for an inattentiveness to detail early on. When, in a 1951 article published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, Beecher wrote that "The consequences to the human body are the same whether an artery is severed by a shell fragment or a broken windshield [and] Pressure on the thigh from the stones of a peasant's cottage in Italy produces exactly the same crush syndrome as the prolonged weight of an axle in Kansas,"<sup>xxxi</sup> we have every reason to think he was relying on strong and telling personal memories. Memories made of quiet delights were at least as robust. "[Our mother] indulged Dad's love of corn," writes his daughter Mary, "...and they had corn on the cob every night it was in season. And cold still on the cob, off the cob, and in fritters, and so on. His Kansas roots, he always said. He had a habit of scraping down the munched-off cob after he'd 'finished' it, to get the hearts out. Best part. He couldn't imagine why others didn't do the same."<sup>xxii</sup>

Glimpses of young Harry are easily conjured. He might personally have witnessed the Methodist Church building transported from neighboring Mount Hope around 1913, and, a daring seven-year-old, dodged one of Peck's four automobiles as it negotiated rut-riddled, packed dirt roads. At some point in his youth he was baptized by immersion in either the Council Hill Church or Church of Christ ceremony.<sup>xxiii</sup> We have him in a Kerley family Christmas gathering photograph in 1910.<sup>xxiv</sup> In another we see him as a youngster of perhaps six or seven boating on the Ninnescah River, he and his Kerley cousins decked out in overalls and round-topped, broad-brimmed hats. He sits—1910-1911—as one among many in a schoolhouse group. "When," writes his son Jonathan, "he took me to Peck about 1950, when I was a boy, he showed me the spot where he had carved his initials 'H U' into the outside of the schoolhouse."<sup>xxv</sup> Perhaps the most lyrical notice is a reminiscence offered by a schoolmate, Wauketa Craw Wright, recollecting old friends and activities in the mid to late 'teens: "Then there was Kenneth Kerley, and his cousin, Harry Unangst. The girls could not decide which boy to have the biggest crush on. Kenneth was so handsome. Harry was gentle and quiet and he played the piano. We would sit on the front porch of his home, and he would play the popular ragtime tunes, as well as the stirring war song, 'Over There'." "What I heard from him," writes Jonathan Beecher of his father, "and also from some of the people in Peck was what a great reader he was as a boy, how when other boys were playing baseball or whatever, Dad could be seen through the window of their house in Peck curled up with a book."<sup>xxvi</sup>

Townsfolk were served by a succession of doctors in solo practice, the most beloved of whom, Dr. Roland Shippey—in residence from 1905 to 1918—worked out of a building that functioned not only as his home but also as a gathering place (one of its drawing cards being a pool hall) and general store. The doctor lived with his wife and two children in the rear, occasionally taking in boarders as well, a

sociable practitioner of such medical arts as the era provided. As the town's apothecary, he concocted a cure-all made of alcohol and sugar-water with a touch of coloring (not unlike the placebos that a future physician, educated at Harvard, would fashion, work with, and describe in the thoroughly clinical manner of an extraordinarily more modern era). Young Harry might have noted Shippey's reliance not on its use as a psychological "instrument" in dealing with the mentally ill, not as a means to measure a known drug's effectiveness or to eliminate bias on the part of the test subject as well as the investigator, not as a "tool" with which to study the mechanisms of drug action, but "as a resource of the harassed doctor in dealing with the neurotic patient"<sup>xxvii</sup> and meted out generously by sip, swig, and swallow. And morphine, another compound that would later come to play such an important role in Beecher's work, the active agent that occupied him in study after study, was also one of Shippey's anodynes (perhaps the most reliable and most often employed) in the face of such suffering as he was called to allay (as in a crush injury caused by a broken axle).

If Harry were at all like the other children, he wasn't in the least peckish in his regard for Dr. Shippey. They enjoyed everything from the creaking floorboards of the doctor's drugstore to his player piano and his famed "cherry foz," a drink concocted on the premises from a soda fountain. (In the late 1940s, Peck, a much quieter town, featured an establishment known as "Sam's Place," one of the attractions to its patrons—among them Harry's father, the octogenarian Henry Eugene Unangst—being a raspberry phosphate soda, a lineal descendent, perhaps, of Dr. Shippey's famed drink.) The youngsters seem to have enjoyed the stories at least as much as the mysterious substances behind Dr. Shippey's counter, one such concerning the doctor's poor wife, who, mistaking arsenic for flour, coated the chicken for frying, noticing in the nick of time that it did not come out quite as expected and rightly chucking the meal prior to serving it.

In 1915, Dr. Shippey joined with more than a dozen others, Harry's father included, to found the Peck Baseball Club, each pledging an unspecified amount of money. The cost, given financial realities of the day, was not incidental (\$32.00 for the lease of land; \$3.00 for a baseball mask; cement sacks, 30 cents; iron stakes, 50 cents; baseballs, \$12.00, and so on). That the 11- or 12-year-old Harry shared the experience of catching a game against clubs from neighboring towns on sunny Saturday afternoons is likely, his preference for reading notwithstanding. That he might have grown bored of such an activity is also likely. Of his father's expectations for this bookish son we can but guess. That we find Harry curled up inside reading rather than out and about, a prankster climbing the water towers, jumping freight cars, and greasing the railroad tracks, speaks more to his mother's than his father's sensibilities. This was to become a point of contention—one, it seems, among many. Flush enough to support the team in 1915, Henry Eugene, none the worse off half a dozen years later, refused to help, or allow others to help, with any of his son's college expenses.

## ■ The Henry Eugene and Mary Kerley Unangst Family

However much of Peck's goings on Harry was privy to is, of course, a point of conjecture. Unless he were hopelessly lost in worlds of his own—and it appears he wasn't—he surely caught something of what was in the air, for there was indeed much to catch. Closer to home, on the other hand—that small white frame house—the air might have proved somewhat less pleasing.

It appears, at least at first, that Henry Eugene was on relatively good terms with his in-laws and townfolk. A gregarious sort—less entrepreneurial than, say, the prodigious Charles Kerley—he was probably no more or less successful than many who worked as tradesmen in town. (The full story behind the “Roll and Unangst” partnership escapes us—why, for instance, the building was eventually known solely as the Roll Building.) We do know that money, or the lack of it, would become a thread of worry and dispute between husband and wife and, eventually, father and son.

While Henry Eugene was at work, Mary Julia insured the social niceties at home, a just-so manner of companionable gentility and a warmth of heart (qualities that describe the greater Unangst and Kerley families both) that endeared her to her children. (This air of care for even the simplest things—the setting of the table—was not lost on her son, who, as an adult with children of his own, had table manners that were “impeccable...he was personally fastidious...he wished we'd have finger bowls...[but] knew that fingerbowls weren't quite the daily routine for us that they might've been for people fancier than we.”)<sup>xxviii</sup> Henry Eugene, by contrast, was something less than a devoted husband and father. That, as time went on, he gambled and drank was not a secret, nor did it escape the notice of his neighbors—or, more ominously, his son—that he stepped out on occasion with other women.

In 1910, the Unangst household included Henry Eugene, Mary Julia, Harry, and another youngster. Harry's sister Ruth was not born until 1913, so the identity of the second child is something of a mystery. Unfortunately, the Census image from which we gather this family data is virtually indecipherable. Harry's age is given as four or nine, the marking indistinct (he was in fact six). The other child, whose given name we cannot make out, bears the surname of Unangst, and is noted to be a male of eleven, his relationship to Henry Eugene being that of nephew (if we are reading correctly, the orthography again leaving much to be desired); Henry Eugene had a brother, Charles, but we know little of his circumstances. What we do know is that this pattern of taking in and ferrying out family members continued into the 1920s; we know further that one such addition to the family a little later on, that of Orie Kerley, Mary Julia's nephew,<sup>xxix</sup> had a profound effect on young Harry.

Harry was a bookish youngster with a father who preferred baseball to books, a not uncommon situation perhaps. Complicating the matter in this case, however, was Henry Eugene's marked preference for Orie's company to that of his own son, feelings of which he made no secret.<sup>xxx</sup> Jonathan Beecher, reflecting on this matter, says simply, “I think my Dad's relationship with his father was difficult from an

early point. Dad was a reader and a studious boy, and his father had very little interest in the life of the mind.” To the adult Harry Beecher’s credit, he did not prevent his own son, in time, from meeting his grandfather, knowing that they might share common interests. “When I was still a little boy,” offers Jonathan, “[my grandfather] sent me a baseball mitt, and when I visited him we went together to a Wichita Eagles ballgame. And in addition to teaching me how to roll cigarettes...we also spent several evenings together listening to wrestling matches on the radio. Anyway, so far as I know, from the beginning grandpa had no interest in or sympathy for Dad’s intellectual ambitions. (Dad’s mother clearly did.) I believe that the tension that must already have existed was compounded by the fact that Dad’s father got along much better with his nephew....”<sup>xxxix</sup> And again, “My impression is that Dad got on well with both sides of the family. His quarrel was with his father, not with all the Unangsts.”<sup>xxxix</sup>

It takes two to quarrel and the seeds of this particular dispute, the provenance of which is somewhat murky, were probably sown long before Harry even realized it. By the mid ’teens, Orle Kerley’s presence was a constant reminder to Harry that he could not compete with his cousin, a gifted athlete seven years his senior. For the most part, day-to-day activity in the Unangst household escapes us, just as certain aspects of it doubtless escaped Harry. We do not know Henry Eugene’s expectations for family life, nor do we know Mary Julia’s. They married late and their ways were perhaps set to an extent of which neither was fully aware. Harry was born when they were in their mid 30s, his sister Ruth when they were in their mid 40s. Was he as precocious in reading family dynamics as he was, curled up by the window, in reading his books? Probably not. His mother fostered both his scholarly bent and a pronounced domesticity. Did his father wish for something different? “Much earlier, before my time,” writes Ruth of her older brother, “our mother used to speak fondly of the strange brews Harry kept simmering on the stove. Some early scientific concoction?” she wonders.<sup>xxxix</sup> We sense Henry Eugene did not speak as fondly of such things as did his wife.

And what of Harry’s other interests? He kept a parrot as a pet, the creature meeting an untimely end when, swinging from his mother’s dress, it plunged from this world to the next at a misstep causing a backwards trip.<sup>xxxix</sup> (He would argue for another parrot to his own wife, who never quite took to the idea of a parrot in the pride; in his letters home during World War II, he championed the idea of a canary, also with no success.)<sup>xxxix</sup> He took a blue ribbon for his sweet-peas; he would still be growing sweet-peas some 50 years later, his quixotic battles with the Burpee Seed Company captured in a colorful correspondence (though sweet-peas caused little trouble, Burpee trumped Beecher in one memorable account of wayward asparagus roots).<sup>xxxix</sup> “Harry was our official candy maker,” wrote his sister Ruth. “And did you know he made excellent cakes? This was all through high school.”<sup>xxxix</sup> And after: “He loved certain foods,” writes Mary Beecher Price of her father, “chocolate cake (which he made once in a great while, with great fanfare, from a recipe of his mother’s).”<sup>xxxix</sup> Interestingly, no stories come down to us regarding Harry’s

father's attempts to teach his son the same lessons he did his grandson: rolling cigarettes, hitting the ballpark, listening to wrestling matches on the radio, and the like.

We know Harry relished stories of his Kerley forbears, stories he took with him during a lifetime of travels; we further know that he rarely spoke of his Unangst roots, even in his own household with three children to entertain.<sup>xxxix</sup> Was it so uninteresting, the tale of a family going all the way back to the mid-1700s?—or did the Unangsts, Henry Eugene and his father, consider the family no different from hundreds of others that immigrated at the time, taking the work available to them, and making their quiet way west with little introspection or self regard? Were the Kerleys simply more effusive in their enthusiasms? Or did his mother, perhaps unaware of how much she needed his ear, tell the Kerley stories as a way of keeping him near? Among the stories were those of his maternal grandfather and his Civil War sword, a sword young Harry might actually have hefted in bursts of enthusiasm. Interestingly, though the sword had some panache, another item—a cherry wall secretary with glass doors—was, in the eyes of the man some 60 or 70 years later, of “much more importance.”<sup>xl</sup> Again, domesticity reigned. And, buoyantly shadowing the familial walls, there might have been hints of a possible Kerley connection to the famous Connecticut abolitionists, especially to Henry Ward Beecher, the fiery preacher who supplied rifles and Bibles to the free-state Kansans as they confronted pro-slavery factions in the 1850s' debate over whether Kansas would enter the Union as a free or a slave state: “Beecher's Bibles”—the name signifying the Holy Books but also, colloquially, the guns themselves, knowledge of which Harry might have picked up in school as well as in the family parlor. Perhaps the Unangsts simply paled in comparison.

## ■ Wichita, Kansas and Phoenix, Arizona

By 1918 the family had moved to Wichita (the exact date is unknown). Such moves were not unusual for the Unangsts. Henry's sister Alice had headed off to the city around 1900, his sister Gertrude by 1910, at which point the Census finds her living in a boarding house and working as a dressmaker. The family might have come into an inheritance,<sup>xli</sup> or they might simply have wished to start anew, options in Peck having run their course. Harry was in the midst of adolescence and his younger sister Ruth was no more than four or five at the time the family took up residence at 1325 South Waco Avenue. Accompanying them was Lola Stripe (later Lola Stripe Bell), the daughter of Mary Julia's younger sister Etta Kerley Stripe, who had died in 1914. (Orie Kerley evidently remained in Peck, shortly thereafter joining the war effort.)<sup>xlii</sup> “There was a screen porch at the back of the house overlooking the small yard,” wrote Jonathan of his visit there in 1977, “and that was Dad's ‘room’. He slept there year round, Lola said, because he liked the fresh air.” It is possible the move involved a plan to provide better schooling for Harry, a sentiment that comports more with his mother's expectations than his father's. Harry would likely have matriculated at one of the nearer regional schools—in Mulvane or Wellington, for instance—rather than

at Wichita High School, a larger school with a more expansive program of study. Proximity to schools offering an advanced curriculum was a common problem for families who wished more for their children than an eighth- or ninth-grade education; it was not unusual, even for families of modest means, to board their children in homes nearer the school, an alternative to an unmanageable commute.<sup>xliii</sup> That Harry was proving a precocious student must have been evident. If this were the case, Harry's mother might in fact have chosen to move the family—at what cost to her marriage, we do not know—in an attempt to keep Harry at her side as insurance against an increasingly distant and contrary husband.<sup>xliiv</sup> Two years later, in a perhaps exaggerated response to an influenza scare, Mary Julia would again move the family, this time to Phoenix, Arizona, leaving her husband behind.

"I guess my feelings about your father," Ruth wrote to her nephew Jonathan regarding circumstances of the day, "were mostly ones of awe—he was the brilliant big brother who was always right (??) and so much smarter than little sister (true, true) that I never dared question his wisdom or opinions." The question marks are Ruth's, as is the rueful confession "true, true," both being sentiments uttered by countless others up and down the years in their dealings with Harry.

In assessing Ruth's remarks, it is tempting to see them as a reflection of more than just a younger sister's take on an older brother's constitution. Awe often results in adulation, a sentiment Harry might have recognized and even exploited, however unconsciously, in an effort to keep his balance amidst domestic tangles and tugs. What of the big brother who was always right? Harry, of course, was not always right. But what of an early need to be perceived as such? In figuring our way through Ruth's reminiscence (offered in adulthood at the request of a nephew who was himself asking questions about a father who had recently passed away), we begin to sense that Harry got back exactly what he wished to get back: a feeling of control and unquestioning praise, a more tempered incarnation of which sometimes characterized aspects of his adult relationships. From Ruth's perspective he was difficult and demanding. "I'm afraid," she continues, "this sounds as though I didn't love Harry but I truly did. In fact I worshipped him from afar—his scholarly world was so remote from my mundane life that we never had much in common except the same parents!" How much of this Ruth was aware of at the time is open to question; she was only nine when Harry left for college. But their time at home together partly spanned Harry's high school years, a period during which their father refused Harry any money whatsoever—nothing for lunch, books, or streetcar fare—not to mention the sort of parental support that might have nourished him. If, as Jonathan reports, Ruth would wryly remark later in life, "Harry got the brains and I got the good personality," it is not, upon reflection, difficult to see why.<sup>xliv</sup> Harry was preoccupied in a way Ruth never was by a discourteous and demanding father and familial circumstances beyond his capacity to explain or perhaps, in the instant, even understand.

If Ruth were an admiring younger sister, Harry was hardly a commiserating older brother. "...I went downtown and bought some pretty yellow crepe for a dress. Someway Harry got the store to

exchange the material for an identical piece of goods only in tan. Much more practical, he convinced me. But I always hated that tan dress.” This and other such stories suggest that Harry’s feelings toward his sister were complicated by more than the garden-variety irksomeness of an older child toward a younger sibling. There is a bullying ambivalence here, a reaction, perhaps, to what he was witnessing daily in his parents’ lives rather than a gratuitously mean-spirited turn of mind. That Harry, in Ruth’s words, got all the brains does not mean that he understood with clarity or confidence what was going on, nor does it imply that he reacted with wisdom or self-confidence at every juncture. It does, however, account for the fervor with which he embraced a high school experience unlike that of either parent or, indeed, anyone close to him.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Harry entered Wichita High School<sup>xlvi</sup> in September 1918. By this point, his father had found work at the Coleman Lantern Company, serving both as night watchman and, according to his son’s high school General Information Record, as a millwright, also at the Coleman Company.<sup>xlvi</sup> Denied an allowance of any sort, Harry too had of necessity found work: a part time job at a local florist, another at the Red Star Flour Mill, and a third at a local newspaper as a carrier—the totality of which he characterized later in life as little more than “cleaning out spittoons.”<sup>xlix</sup> “He complained once,” writes Ruth, “that the odor of the flowers got rather sickening in the back room.” Of his experience at the Red Star Mill, she says that “a bonus of this job was that he frequently brought home lovely fragrant loaves of bread,” going on to note that “the home economist”—an appellation tinged perhaps with a sort of decorous sarcasm, the tan dress still twirling in her mind—“was experimenting with different types of winter wheat, I guess.” Interestingly, he was also formulating a somewhat dandified notion of himself—a reaction, perhaps, to the disarray in a workaday father’s all-too-common life and a romanticized notion of an adored mother’s strength of character and beauty. He saved his money, says his sister, and, when he spent it, generally did so sensibly. Given his father’s attitude, the question of whether or not Harry contributed to family expenses is an open one. Most likely he jealously guarded his own earnings, occasionally splurging—perhaps in response to his father’s provocation—in almost unaccountable ways, the purchase of a \$40.00 overcoat,<sup>1</sup> for instance, an unusually extravagant acquisition, especially given general family circumstances that bordered on dire. One day on the streetcar, Ruth reports, “some crude man standing next to Harry spit into the wind and some sputum hit the sleeve of this wonderful new coat. It was so sad and we all suffered along with Harry over this dreadful experience.” We imagine the scene in the house that evening, Harry at wit’s end, Ruth perhaps cowering a bit at what must have seemed a gargantuan and slovenly injustice, Mary Julia calming them both, Henry Eugene shrugging it off as one of life’s hard knocks. Indeed, by this time we have, in Harry and Henry Eugene, combatants at considerable cross-purposes—Harry, intemperate and willful, with few outlets for a sublimated anger at an increasingly difficult and distant father; Henry Eugene, complacent, gamely irascible, irresponsible, and hardheaded till the end.

But school, too, beckoned, and Harry took a standard complement of academic courses, garnering grades in the high 80s. His freshman program consisted of English, Algebra, Latin, General Science, Drawing and Design; as a sophomore, he continued in English, picking up Geometry and Biology (in which he recorded a grade of 92, his highest). He was given credit but no grades in Music and “Gymnasium.”<sup>li</sup> That Harry, perhaps for the very first time, was meeting and mixing with well-trained teachers and other students of aptitude and artfulness, and doing well in their presence, suggests a dawning self-assuredness, what must have been a blessed relief on a somewhat dreary path—three jobs, a thicket of parental distress (which was about to become more complicated than ever), and a what-next worry that probably required more than sweet-peas and piano music to allay.

During this period—1918 through 1920—young Lola Bell was boarded out, two of Harry’s maternal cousins, Emma (the daughter of Mary Julia’s brother Edwin Kerley) and Mabel (the daughter of Richard Kerley), having come to Wichita to live with the Unangsts (Emma to work at the Eberhardt-Mays Music Store). We have a photograph of young Ruth as a student at the Peck School dating from 1918-1919, suggesting that she, too, had been sent elsewhere to live, at least for a time.<sup>lii</sup> So Harry found himself in the company of women, a situation that may or may not have had much significance at the time. There is nothing to suggest this affected him badly, nothing to suggest it provided him pleasurable interludes beyond those he already shared with a comfortable mother. Perhaps he welcomed additional insulation from his father, who, Jonathan reports, in addition to his ungainly swipes at Harry’s need for spending-money, made his life difficult in unspecified small ways. This particular arrangement—the addition of two adult cousins—must have been planned by Mary Julia (it is improbable Henry Eugene would have encouraged such seedings); perhaps she was lonesome for family, perhaps the new additions helped balance the financial ledger.

The Wichita experience was cut short, however. At some point after Harry finished his sophomore year, Mary Julia made the surprising decision to move the family west to Phoenix. If family sources are correct, Henry Eugene stayed behind, possibly to continue working (though it is hard to imagine him sharing a home with his wife’s two nieces).<sup>liii</sup> We do not know if Mary Julia had specific personal concerns—there was no mass movement out of south Kansas at that time, influenza having reared its tormenting head—or if she were motivated by more troublesome feelings of domestic discord. We do not know why she chose Phoenix (they took up residence at 509 E. Portland Street) or how she financed the trip. Harry was upset to be pulled away from Wichita, his concern centering on the new school he would be attending.

Mary Julia and the children, Ruth having rejoined the family at some point, were gone, however, only a short time before Henry Eugene was summoned to join them. Ruth, now seven, developed appendicitis and Harry, too, fell ill (though his affliction seems to have been less arresting). Henry Eugene seems not to have had much trouble finding employment, working first on the construction of the



Phoenix stockyards and then as a clerk in a general store (as noted in the 1920 Federal Census). The family seems to have stayed for well over a year, and Harry, who took a job as a carrier for the local *Arizona Republican*, duly began his studies at the recently opened Union High School. The 10 October 1961 edition of the paper—some 40 years later—would chronicle the stay, at least in part, with an article entitled “Newsboy to Anesthetist” by reporter Julian DeVries, who seems to have taken an interest in goings-on at Harvard Medical School at the time. The DeVries piece, which carries a picture of Henry K. Beecher over the caption, “Famed Anesthesiologist is Former Arizona Resident,” describes him as “almost the exact double in appearance of Arizona’s Sen. Barry Goldwater.” (Beneath this picture, on the family’s copy of the article, the doctor himself would write, “I like to think this does not look like me.”) The article notes that the famed anesthesiologist’s professional “interest lies in the study and alleviation of pain and other symptoms associated with illness, such as nausea, vomiting, anxiety, fear, etc.,” mentioning his special interest in the placebo effect. All well and good. Young Harry Unangst, fresh from Wichita, had a harder time of it and would probably have benefited from medicaments, real or imagined.<sup>liv</sup>

Harry’s Union High transcript is spotty at best, perhaps signaling troubles of one sort or another. The steady student from Wichita earned an ‘A’ in Geometry, perhaps because he had studied the subject earlier. In his junior year, he went from a ‘C’ to a ‘B’ in English, got a ‘C’ in Algebra (the carry-over effect failing him in this instance at least), ‘C’s in French, and a ‘D’ in Chemistry (which he pulled up to a ‘C’ by year’s end). His senior year grades were somewhat better, but hardly exceptional—the ‘C’ in Algebra dogging him still, an ‘A’ in Trigonometry, a ‘C’ and a ‘B’ in French, ‘B’s in History and Physics. (A grade of ‘C’ should be interpreted as good or average, without the somewhat pejorative stain it might carry today. Still, Harry’s marks most likely indicate inconsistency of effort or ambition, not lack of native intelligence or capacity to learn.)

Just when he resumed at Wichita High is a mystery, Union’s letter grades having been entered alongside Wichita’s numerical grades for the junior and senior years (the registrar going to some length to assign credit ratings to the letter grades), though it is almost certain he was back before his senior year ended, for a graduation date of 24 May 1922 is noted on his Wichita school record. But what might have caused the ups and downs in Phoenix? The difficulty in adjusting to a new environment, much as we might expect of most any adolescent? Lack of interest or motivation? Pure recalcitrance at a move he fought the whole while long? Uninspiring teachers? Difficulties at home?

This last compels our attention but, in the end, the reason is unimportant. Harry saw himself though the unhappy experience, relying on his talents to fashion a place for himself in the presence of unwieldy and perhaps unyielding circumstances. There is nothing to suggest that he and his father were on good terms or had been for a long while. The toll this took on his mother is unknown; whatever trials Henry Eugene visited on Harry were likely hers too. And she had young Ruth to care for. If the move to

Phoenix were related to a health scare back in Wichita, the trip had been successful. Were it also an attempt to salvage a family life in peril, it had been a failure.

Back, then, to Wichita. The move itself is undocumented. Harry having asserted a desire to continue on in school, the University of Kansas in Lawrence was probably his only option other than that presented by smaller institutions on a par with today's junior or community colleges. Expenses would be more manageable, as would transportation and such. This was, in fact, an extraordinary reach, something outside the life experience of anyone around him. And there would be no keeping him close to home in this instance. That home still weighed heavily is amply apparent, though.

Harry had no problem entering as a member of KU's Class of 1926 (as evidenced by a clean Registration/Enrollment Card).<sup>lv</sup> Of primary concern was the cost and how it was to be handled, Henry Eugene having weighed in with a flat refusal of a loan secured by family property. (No other funds seem to have been available.) But where was he at the time? On Harry's Registration Card, the name *Mary K. Unangst* is entered as "Parent or Guardian"—an unusual lapse if his father were acting as head-of-household. The information (Name, Address—1325 S. Waco, as before—Preparatory School, and the like) is not entered in Harry's hand but in that of someone taking or transcribing answers. Assuming Harry went off to Lawrence by himself, and that he dictated the requisite data, the name of his mother as parent-of-record is significant. Either Henry Eugene, after his rather foul refusal of financial help, was temporarily out of the picture or Harry, whose distaste for his father's failings had finally reached a point beyond which he didn't care to take it, simply eliminated him in mind and imagination. The latter, in the eyes of the family today, is more likely the case. And it is an extraordinary case, indicative of a young man intent on making his way in a bigger world and burning bridges to do so. That the bridges stayed burned is indicated by yet another mysterious entry in Harry's university file, this time on his official transcript, issued after completion of his undergraduate and graduate school course work. The name *Mary Unangst* is again listed as parent or guardian, Wichita as her home, but, astonishingly, "Night Fireman" as her occupation. This sort of mix-up—a redefinition of familial arrangements—seems to have characterized Harry's circumstances at the time. We can but note and wonder at the feelings behind it.

That family life probably changed dramatically for Mary Julia and Ruth at Harry's departure is beyond doubt. We do not know if Emma and Mabel Kerley were still in place; in all likelihood, they remained in the house at least during the family's time in Phoenix, if for no other reason than to monitor the property (we have no evidence it had been rented out). Further, we know little of the circumstances of the next few years, and what we do know is unpleasant.

Jonathan Beecher, in the company of Lola Stripe Bell, reflecting some 30 years later on this difficult period, writes, "The Unangsts had been respectable people, Lola says, like the Kerleys in Peck, and they did things with a certain formality (everyone sits down together for meals—). But Dad's

father—a ‘scoundrel’—had already been spending much of his time, and the family’s money, drinking, gambling, and philandering. Dad, I think, never forgave his father for these things and especially for cheating on his mother. Lola says Dad would never take even a small drink during those years.” On the other hand, Harry “was always pretty reticent about his father and his early years. But I never heard him speak ill of his father.” (Astonishingly, he helped support his father financially in later years, sending monetary gifts with some regularity.)<sup>lvi</sup>

Harry, off at Lawrence, was no longer a witness to the everyday drama of life at home. But he could not help being aware of them. He was on good terms with his Kerley family relations and had a particular fondness for his father’s sister, Gertrude Unangst Parcher, affectionately called “Aunt Dee,” a “feisty, well-spoken woman whose house [in Wichita] was always spick and span and who kept two canaries named Bing and Dixie (for Bing and Dixie Lee Crosby)”<sup>lvii</sup>—just the sort of thing that Harry would delight in. But there was nothing compelling enough to keep him home, a great deal to tempt him away, and nothing of moment to call him back.

## ■ The University of Kansas at Lawrence

So Lawrence hailed and Harry answered. The college charged a \$10.00 matriculation fee, a \$20.00 incidental fee, and another \$10.00 graduation fee. The costs for nonresidents were higher, as were those for students in different schools (such the Lawrence-based Clinical Department of Medicine).<sup>lviii</sup> The costs for room and board are not reported—there was only one small women’s dormitory and the cafeteria served only about 800 meals per days—but even these modest expenses seem to have created a problem in the Unangst family. What, then, of the dust-up in his parents’ lives about accepting a loan, using family land for collateral? The idea was broached, the money was there. Why not take it? There is some question about whose land would be held, the Kerleys’ or the Unangsts’. Either way, Henry Eugene forbade it. And either way, the situation speaks to extreme emotions—a rancid self-interest and perhaps even jealousy on the part of Henry Eugene, a weary and possibly cowering retreat on the part of his wife. That Harry was not averse to work and that he husbanded his money well is not in question. That he developed a foppish side—his son recalls a “rather dapper photo of him, tennis racket in hand, from about that time”<sup>lix</sup> to go with the image of a \$40 overcoat and a predilection for shopping in only the best Wichita stores—is evidence, perhaps, of a protective veneer, an overdone trust in appearances, an unsettling sense of vanity. Or perhaps it reflects a wish to distance himself from his father (who must have fed his own vanity whenever possible), to endear himself (clumsily) to his mother, defending her tastes in an overly obvious manner. All are considerations in inquiring about his college life, his collegiate persona. He was remaking himself, fashioning a new self-image, not for the first time and certainly not for the last. Just a couple of years later—as early, perhaps, as 1924, his junior year—he began experimenting with changes

to his name, the formulation *Harry K.U. Beecher* arising from the erasure marks over *Harry K. Unangst*, the original signature in some of his books.<sup>lx</sup>

Harry arrived—11 September 1922, his official matriculation date—on a campus whose educational goals were remarkably similar to those we hear enunciated at many colleges and universities today. “The aim of the college during the first two years,” states the University’s *Annual Catalogue*, “is to train the student in various types of fundamental courses, thus enabling him to lay a foundation for training in some special field during his junior and senior years.” (Of the 49 courses offered to first and second year students, only one, Rhetoric, was required of all, no matter their major. Given the mature Beecher’s lecturing posture—a rather tentative delivery from a scripted talk, a touch of manufactured stuttering, an imperviousness to audience distractions<sup>lxi</sup>—we might have cause to wonder at his success in this class; in fact, he pulled a ‘B’ in his first semester and an ‘A’ in his second, indicating perhaps some talent for manipulation and subterfuge on the dais or before the podium.)<sup>lxii</sup>

But the University itself was hardly a sylvan retreat. It was a state university in a state grappling with funding issues and often coming up short. When Harry arrived, the campus consisted of perhaps two dozen buildings, many of which were in disrepair. Old buildings were coming down and new buildings were going up. The grand project that spanned his time there was a new football stadium, begun in 1922 and completed in 1927—a student union, which was to have been an integral part of the building package, having to wait its turn, and a decidedly second place turn at that. While the older area of the campus had a deceptively warm feel (facades often masking structural problems that would render their buildings unusable were rehab plans not considered), the newer grounds generally had an earnest but barren look—little landscaping, few of the amenities we associate today with large public institutions. Rooms in and around Lawrence were scarce and often expensive to rent, and the dining facility was not large enough to serve the general community. One building Harry might have frequented, the old Snow Hall, home to some of the science departments, was thought virtually unfit for use. Its foundation was crumbling, the floors separating from the walls, its rooms just one misused Bunsen-burner away from general conflagration. The rooms were either too cold or too hot and parasite-laden rats ran rampant. In fact, the University was often the subject of legislative and alumni debate, concerns centering on its endowment, its budget, its physical plant, the salaries of its professors, its aim to provide a good educational program for an undergraduate and graduate student body totaling less than 3,000, many of whom—the first in their families to consider, much less attain, anything beyond a secondary school education—nonetheless gloried in the challenges and freedoms the University provided (we find pictures, for instance, of a women’s field hockey team as well as a women’s rifle club). Still, circumstances were dicey. The early 1920s are described as a time of optimism and prosperity, the mid-’20s as chancy at best, the dustbowl, Depression-ridden 1930s as disastrous.<sup>lxiii</sup>

We know very little of Harry's individual circumstances—where he lived, where he took his meals, and so forth. Happily, though, we can trace his academic and social life to a considerable extent with the records on hand. Students pursued either a Bachelor of Arts degree or a Bachelor of Science degree, the latter granted upon request to those who had otherwise completed course-work in any number of fields but who had done concentrated work in the science of choice and whose applications had been approved by the faculty in that discipline. Significantly, Harry chose the former path, opting for the A.B.—an indication that his was a college experience of exploration on many fronts. Among the departments offering courses for the major was that of the Physical Sciences (Chemistry, Physics and Astronomy, and Geology), and it was to this that Harry would apply. Why? He had demonstrated some aptitude in a number of areas, but had excelled in none. His high school grades do not indicate a natural talent for anything in particular. He was a strong reader, though, and with proper guidance would doubtless have flourished, no matter the subject. The truth is that Harry, like so many others, probably entered college as something of a generalist, happy just to have gotten there. A natural bent toward the sciences asserted itself because his natural genius, of which he may have been only minimally aware, would best find flower there. At any rate, “the College course” mandated study in a number of disciplines, in some of which he prospered, in some of which he punted. In fact, his four years show a steady march, studded at points by minor trip-ups, motivated by intellectual curiosity and social adventure. If anything, his junior and senior year courses were more varied than the welter of prescribed courses in his first two years. In his time at the University he received no grade lower than a ‘C’, a bevy of them coming in the first semester of his sophomore year (Elementary Logic, Introduction to Philosophy, Analytical Geometry II, and Integral Calculus). Significantly, in the course weighted most heavily with credit hours, Quantitative Analysis, he received an ‘A’. His second semester brought another ‘C’, this one in the powerhouse course (weighted as was Quantitative Analysis) of Engineering Physics. In the continuation of this subject, which he took as a first-semester junior, he did no better. He could, of course, have done much worse, the grade of ‘C’ indicating the solid work expected of a student trending toward success rather than mediocrity. (This was the case in high school and it would continue to be so in medical school.)

His work as a freshman (1922-1923) earned him a place on the Honor Roll (his only such designation as an undergraduate). His efforts served him well in another regard; he was awarded, for use in the upcoming academic year, the Charles S. Griffin Scholarship (the interest, awarded annually, on a \$1,000 gift made in 1910 by the mother of a KU alumnus killed in a swimming accident). He mastered his two semesters of Rhetoric, rounding out the first term with an ‘A’ in College Algebra, Modern French Writers, and Inorganic Chemistry. His only ‘C’ came in a bluntly labeled course in Exercise (a required subject: three hours a week in the gymnasium). He did manage a ‘B’ after working through once-weekly lectures in Hygiene (more exercised about Exercise in his second semester, he registered a ‘B’). A first-

semester 'B' in French Composition yielded to a second-semester 'A' in French Prose and Poetry. Analytics and Differential Calculus rewarded him with a 'B' apiece, but he topped out with an 'A' in the heavily weighted Qualitative Analysis.—All in all an exceptional showing.

What happened next is anyone's guess, the string of 'C's to begin his second year (1923-24) the result perhaps of a somewhat disaffected mind, a carry-over discomfort from difficulties at home in Wichita (to which he likely returned for the summer break, there to earn tuition and book money); perhaps it was nothing more than an indication that he had grown a bit cavalier about academic matters generally. By second semester, he had righted the ship, bringing home an 'A' in Sociology and 'B's in French Composition and a mathematics offering called Theory of Equations. An 'A' in Exercise in the first term toppled to a 'B' in the second.

By the end of his sophomore year, he was a member of the Professional Chemical Fraternity (Alpha Chi Sigma), so he had, early on, cast his lot with the chemists, thereby gaining a rich intellectual footing for perhaps the very first time. The fraternity had 32 members, along with ten so-called *Fratres in Facultate* (a local term loosely translated as "Members in Faculty"—faculty members, that is, who met with, counseled, and chatted up students enjoying the same or similar interests), and had, of all things, a house flower (the red carnation), a house color (Prussian blue), and a house publication, *The Hexagon* (about which we know nothing), all of which speak to a well-ordered if rustic quaintness, much as the members might have enjoyed as reminders of hearth and home. As a sophomore, Harry acted in the French Play, perhaps at that point finding a friend in a young woman named Mattie Crumrine, who was to play a major role in his move beyond the KU campus. Miss Crumrine, some four years older than Harry, would take her A.B. in French in 1924 and then, as a graduate student, begin teaching undergraduate courses. Active in school theatricals, she may have joined or even directed Harry in the French Play and might possibly have been his classroom teacher later on. Interestingly, she had chosen Romance Languages—she studied and taught Italian as well—over Chemistry as an academic major, rightly figuring that career opportunities for women in science would be few. Their ties perhaps went deeper still; like Harry, she was not well off financially, had taxing family obligations, and had experienced firsthand the climate and culture of turn-of-the-century Kansas.<sup>lxiv</sup> (Later in life, Harry spoke of her with such warmth that his son speculated that she was responsible for extending his career thoughts beyond Kansas, prepping him even for study abroad.)<sup>lxv</sup> By all accounts, she was a statuesque beauty, lively and fun, enough in itself to turn the young man's eye and rev the more mature man's imagination. Possibly Miss Crumrine's influence was at play in refocusing his attention as the sophomore year wound down.

The summer of 1924—that between Harry's sophomore and junior year—was much different from the last and signaled again a major change in focus regarding family matters in Wichita. He stayed on in Lawrence to take a summer session course in Bacteriology, a rigorous offering in which he got a 'B' and came to know more intimately Professor Lee E. Treece; Professor Treece would guide his work

generally and write on his behalf when he came to apply for admission to Harvard Medical School a few years later. Harry might also have picked up a few dollars working on or near campus, his employment history, of which we have only a sketchy knowledge, suggesting some University or University-related work. In all likelihood, Harry returned home for some period of time but he was evidently finding his time in Lawrence a good deal more to his liking than his time in Wichita.

Whether spurred on by his second-semester sophomore-year work or his summer in Lawrence, Harry hit his stride, and then some, by his junior year (1924-1925). In addition to the physics work he carried over from his sophomore year, he logged two terms of Organic Chemistry (earning a 'B' in both semesters) and one in Differential Equations (for which he received a 'C'). He was also pursuing other interests outside of science, earning a 'B' in Narrative and Descriptive Writing (a creative writing course), the same grade he received for Elementary German (an intensive course, to judge by the credit hours assigned it) and a course in the Short Story. He acted this year in the Senior Play and participated in inter-fraternity tennis tournaments.

By this point Harry had met and studied under the Chemistry Department Chairman, Professor Hamilton B. Cady, another who was to champion his cause a few years hence. As young Dr. Beecher, chief of the anesthesia service at the Massachusetts General Hospital, he would write Cady that he had never found "a clearer or more accurate statement of the fundamentals of general chemistry" as he had under Cady's tutelage. He had, he said, just purchased another copy of Cady's text, *General Chemistry* (1916), his old copy having grown tattered with use after 18 years. Curiously downplaying his anesthesia role (and perhaps indicative of how he viewed it or, indeed, how it was then viewed by the medical establishment generally), he continued, "I am on the full time staff at the Harvard Medical School and function in both the departments of pharmacology and surgery where I do research on the anesthetic agents" (17 October 1940). Within the year, he wrote again. "I think you will be interested to know that Harvard University has just granted me a full professorship, the title being the Henry Isaiah Dorr Professor of Research in Anesthesia..." (28 May 1941). Cady, meanwhile, had written that he was glad to hear of Beecher's work. "I haven't seen it," he said, "but I have heard that your book on anesthetics is very valuable and that you and it are widely recognized as authorities in this field. Knowing you and your careful work, I knew long ago that you would reach the top in any line that you chose" (25 October 1940).<sup>lxvi</sup> Doubtless Harry had selfless reasons for writing; he was truly indebted to Cady and wrote with great feeling. Given Harry's relations with his father, though, it is difficult to suppose that an exchange of this nature could ever have taken place within the family circle, a circumstance that Harry, at some level, must have registered. That Harry had long since outpaced his father in academic and professional work is irrelevant; many sons have done and do likewise. But Harry could not thank his father for support of any sort nor could his father possibly have responded as did Cady—as, that is, a caring elder who had recognized and nurtured a precious talent.

Until this point, Harry had added credit hours as would any ambitious undergraduate. That his transcript is dotted not only with 'A's and 'B's but also the occasional 'C' indicates his extraordinary overall success as well as something more. His was an intrepid advance through a rich academic program in which he made room for what interested him and took such grades as he earned without worry or consequence. In any event, the summer of 1925, that between his junior and senior years, launched him into a different orbit entirely. He stayed on in Lawrence again, taking a full semester's worth of courses: Electro-Chemistry (for which he earned an 'A'), Roentgenology ('B'), and French Conversation (another 'B'). More audaciously, he enrolled, by permission of the Dean, in Combustion (a graduate level course for which no grade is recorded) and Advanced Laboratory Techniques (another graduate level course, in which he garnered a 'B').

By the time he entered his senior year (1925-1926), he was one of two Alpha Chi Sigma members to represent the fraternity on KU's Professional Panhellenic Council (consisting of 22 members from the 12 Professional Fraternities), a measure perhaps of his sociability, popularity, and clubbability. (He kept his affiliation with his house during his graduate year, as did many at the time.) Before the year was out, he was also marching directly on into graduate work. The fall semester allowed him time to catch his breath. A measure of the pleasure he must have been feeling is found the fact that he began to study piano again (a course for which he received no credit but a grade of 'B'). His coursework included Physical Chemistry (for which he received an 'A'), General Physiology (a 'B'), and Modern German Writers (an 'A'). In the spring he took Scientific German (in which he recorded a 'B' and gave him a sufficient reading knowledge of the language to fulfill Harvard Medical School's foreign language requirement)<sup>lxvii</sup>, Essay Writing (an 'A'), and a second class in Narrative and Descriptive Writing ('B'). Having already dipped into the pool of graduate level courses, and with his Master's work in mind, he took a course labeled simply Thesis, for which he received an 'A'; continuing this work in the 1926 summer session, he earned another 'A'.

As far as we know, Harry entertained no thoughts of medical school as he finished up his undergraduate studies and began his graduate work; in fact, he seems to have entered the graduate year (1926-1927) set on further work—research, perhaps—in that field and no other. In a 23 March 1929 letter of application to Dr. David L. Edsall, Dean of the Harvard Medical School, for a Fellowship to support research on which he was then engaged as a first-year medical student, he noted among his qualifications that he had had "About two years experience as analyst in a commercial laboratory," an unexplained reference to some work back in Kansas—perhaps summer work?—that dated to his University years. A newspaper source, *The Highland* (Kansas) *Vidette*, using biographical information Harry himself doubtless supplied when he went to teach at Highland College in 1927, noted that he had worked as "an industrial chemist," and his son Jonathan mentions some work doing chemical analyses of wheat. These oblique references come with no specificity as to time and place, and contain no hint of medicine, either



its practice or its theoretical underpinnings.<sup>lxviii</sup> As he looked toward life after graduation, the possibility of working professionally as a chemist, perhaps at a university where research was rewarded by academic rank, or even prized for its own sake, must at least have tugged at him.

Harry had skipped not only the Bachelor of Science major but also the Bachelor of Science in Medicine major, the latter involving simultaneous registration in KU's College of Arts and Sciences and its School of Medicine, part of which—the Scientific Department (comprising Anatomy, Biochemistry, and Physiology) was located in Lawrence, part (the Clinical Department) in Kansas City. There were added fees and expenses in taking this path, perhaps precluding young men without the financial means from readily signing on. That Harry didn't is most simply attributable to a lack of interest in medicine as a career. At some point, though, his thoughts began to reformulate themselves. His late pursuit of spoken and then Scientific German possibly signals an interest, generated by faculty mentors such as Treece and Cady, in the groundbreaking work just then being reported by German scientists on the sulfa drugs and their seemingly miraculous implications for the medical sciences generally. Treece, an Assistant Professor of Bacteriology, also served on the KU medical faculty and might have brought stories of one sort or another of work being done in the laboratories at KU itself. The next two years—1926-1927 (Harry's graduate year at KU), the summer of 1927 (which he spent in Boston to ready himself for admission to Harvard Medical School), and 1927-1928 (when he taught at Highland College in northeastern Kansas)—would prove pivotal in wrenching his interests away from chemistry (though he was rarely at a distance from the methods he honed and the insight he gained from his work in chemistry) and, for a time, toward bacteriology, the latter being that on which he would trade to gain admittance to Harvard.<sup>lxix</sup>

For Harry—as, perhaps, for few others—the world of college life must have been a liberating one. His academic efforts had placed him in the top third of his graduating class of about 680, and undoubtedly Miss Crumrine provided him an example of spectacular social and academic achievement. A member of KU's Honorary French Society, Education Society, and the Quill Club (KU's Literary Fraternity), she had also been elected to Phi Beta Kappa; that she continued on for her Master's degree meant continued exchanges with Harry in any number of areas—everything, in fact, from chemistry to creative writing.

Circumstances in Wichita may or may not have intruded on Harry's life in Lawrence to an appreciable extent during his undergraduate years. We do not know how often he returned home and have no correspondence dating to this period. If he were at all preoccupied with familial matters, the circumstances elude us. What we do know is that he willed his way toward academic success of a high order, his chemistry courses netting him a slew of 'A's and clearly establishing him as a star in the making.

## ■ Fratres in Facultate

Among the faculty with whom Harry came in contact and with whom he mixed in the Chemical Fraternity was the dearly-remembered Hamilton P. Cady, named in 1921 Chairman of the Department of Chemistry. A graduate of KU, having taken his A.B. in 1897 and his Ph.D. in 1903, he reached full Professor status in 1911. On 7 December 1905, Cady and a colleague, Professor David F. McFarland, were the first to find helium in natural gas, a claim to fame the University still celebrates. No doubt the Alpha Chi Sigma conversation turned occasionally to the everyday magic that surrounded such discoveries, and to the hope of discoveries yet to be made. Another faculty member, Dr. E.H.S. Bailey, had, in cooperation with Dr. Samuel J. Crumbine (Secretary of the Kansas State Board of Health), engaged in work to improve food purity. “Among other outrages,” say KU historians, “Bailey discovered that Kansans were eating ‘chocolate icing made of brown paint and glucose,’ lemon juice laced with lead, and hamburger ‘doped’ with embalming fluid. Widely publicized by the Board of Health, Bailey’s research helped secure passage of the Kansas Pure Food and Drug Act of 1907.”<sup>lxx</sup>

One chemist doing basic research using an elegant and simple protocol, another serving the public good by investigational studies suggested by a social conscience and common sense, and affecting public policy—two examples for Harry to ponder, perhaps.

Well-known too were the achievements of Dr. Marshall A. Barber, a pioneering bacteriologist who had left KU in 1911 to turn his attention to the fight against the worldwide menace of malaria. In fact, Harry’s second-year bacteriology course was probably a lineal descendent of Barber’s courses at the medical school just after the turn of the century. Bacteriology was a young discipline, Barber’s contribution to it being the invention of the micropipette, a device that would for the first time permit scientists easily “to separate, and then work with, single-celled microorganisms.” Barber’s instrument allowed for confirmation of “the germ theory of disease. Using his micropipettes, Barber succeeded,” we learn, “in capturing a single anthrax bacterium from culture.” The resulting excursion, that of “depositing the lone bacillus into a mouse’s peritoneal cavity,” resulted in infection, as the germ theory predicted. Barber, an 1891 graduate of KU, had gone on to earn a second Bachelor’s degree at Harvard, and then a Master’s. His Ph.D. in Bacteriology, conferred by Harvard in 1907, came as he assumed the Chair of the new Department of Bacteriology and Pathology at the KU Medical School as well as the directorship of the clinical laboratories. Of some appeal, perhaps, to Harry Unangst in the 1920s (were the stories of Barber’s life then current) would have been his place in a farming family that had moved from Indiana to the east Kansas prairies in the 1870s, the youth having worked the fields near Emporia, southwest of Topeka, and learned to read, to write, to add and subtract in a one-room schoolhouse.<sup>lxxi</sup> Parallels to the Unangst and Kerley clans suggest themselves, but whether or not Harry drew them is unknown.

Examples such as that of Drs. Cady and Bailey would have been both inspiring and immediate, and Harry might have envisioned such a course for himself. Were others of the same mind? Perhaps. We do not have a ledger of the aspirations of Harry's fellow fraternity members. Barber's life, though, might have been a worthy exemplar. Marshall Barber, though gone from the school, might actually have been the most intriguing—his background, the depth of his learning, his inventiveness, his Harvard pedigree—notably, a Ph.D., not an M.D.—his academic appointments, his directorship of laboratories, his universal citizenry as he traveled from east Kansas to the Philippines, Central and South America, Greece, India, Singapore and Russia, his work for the military during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War (a major in the U.S. Army's Sanitation Corps, responsible for disease management and prevention). We do well to consider Barber's influence in taking note of Beecher's long-standing interest in public health, even as it expressed itself in his children's recollections of his predilection for baptism by immersion. "I do vividly remember my own baptism at about age 12," writes his daughter Mary, "water dripping down my face from the dunking (backwards)...me and the minister in floating robes in the font (a little pond behind the altar) of the Baptist Church in Mattapan (MA), with our Episcopalian minister...as the water dripped down, I licked off a few drops and could see [my father] squirm—his keen sense of public health competed with his keen wish to have us baptized, as he had been, by immersion.... He'd been baptized in a river, so the public health issue was—if not irrelevant—different."<sup>lxxii</sup> Beecher would have been about 50 at the time of his daughter's baptism—yet another face, a child's eye's view, of the famous professor.

So, in the end, after receiving his A.B., Harry's the next move was no move at all. He stayed on in Lawrence to complete work on a Master's degree, the graduate year affording him the opportunity to take on some teaching duties as well and perhaps pursue research interests at the University or beyond.

## ■ 1926

Harry Unangst graduated from the University of Kansas as a member of the 54<sup>th</sup> Commencement class in June 1926. His graduate year, the costs for which seem to have presented no more of an obstacle than those for any other, promised much—more time at Lawrence, work on his thesis topic, some teaching, and, most of all, continued independence. He completed his coursework in fairly short order. The fall of 1926 found him studying Phase Rule, Diagnostics, and Advanced Topics in Organic Chemistry (for which he received grades of 'B', 'A', and 'B', respectively). In the spring of 1927 he finished off his thesis, "A Determination of the Atomic Weight of Nitrogen Occluded in Fergusonite," and finished up by earning another 'B' in the continuation of the first-semester course in Organic Chemistry and an 'A' in Solutions. He was also awarded membership in Sigma Xi, a signal honor reserved for those demonstrating exemplary achievement and research potential.

His academic work was essentially finished within a year, but that year was interrupted by absolutely chilling circumstances. We don't know how, where or when he received news of his mother's death from pneumonia just a few days after Christmas. He might have been home on holiday recess or he might have been summoned from Lawrence with this devastating news. We don't know Mary Julia's situation in the weeks leading up to her death. Harry, much more a soul-mate of his mother than his father, had looked to her for strength, support, and company, for assurances that his choices were well-founded, their worth self-evident. He had now to deal directly with a profligate father, a grim business that couldn't help but end badly, as well as tend to young Ruth, only thirteen years old.

After Mary Julia's funeral (she was buried in Council Hill Cemetery next to Eugene, her first-born who had died in infancy),<sup>lxxiii</sup> Harry arranged for a new apartment in Wichita for his father and sister, perhaps engaging relatives to look in from time to time;<sup>lxxiv</sup> in fact, he noted on his Harvard Medical School application his own permanent address as "Hillcrest Apartments, Wichita" (though he doubtless spent little time there himself). Both Emma and Mabel Kerley, Mary Julia's nieces, were residing in Wichita, as were his aunts Alice Unangst and Gertrude Unangst Parcher (the latter with her husband and young son). It is difficult to imagine his state of mind at the time and, had he any reason to doubt that things would go poorly, he had but to wait a very short while. Evidently leaving Ruth behind, his father returned to Peck to live, beginning a pattern of joblessness, irresponsible spending when he managed to pick up a few dollars, and a boarding-room life ill-suited to the needs of a young daughter. At a distance, it would seem the loss of his wife pushed him over an edge he was approaching for a while; for Ruth, the loss of her mother, coupled with her father's typically erratic behavior, must have been close to unbearable.

## ■ Entanglement and Release

We do not know when Henry Eugene Unangst quit Wichita, but we do know that Harry entered a Petition for Guardianship "in the matter of the Estate of Ruth M. Unangst, minor heir of Mary K. Unangst, deceased," in August 1927 in the Probate Court of Sedgwick County. Distrustful of his father, he wished to secure for Ruth her small inheritance, "an undivided one-fourth interest in Real Estate of the total value of about \$7,500 of the rental value of about \$150.00 per year. The minor's interest of the rent being about \$37.50 per year." Harry himself inherited likewise, as did Mabel Kerley and Emma Kerley. The property was the Kerley family farm (on which there still existed a mortgage), which was being rented at the time, the rent comprising the inheritance. "Now comes Ruth M. Unangst, minor, being over 14 years, and request[s] the appointment of Harry K. Unangst as guardian." The petition, dated 19 August 1927, was duly accepted.<sup>lxxv</sup>

That Harry felt the need to sue for guardianship reflects a rather grim reality and he doesn't seem to have fared well personally in the realities of everyday life. His daughter Mary retails a letter, dating to the period after Mary Julia's death when Ruth was in Wichita, in which "Harry Unangst [the elder] asks Harry Beecher [his son] for \$2 for some Railway Express cost for things he wanted to send to Ruth but didn't have the money." What must it have been like for Harry to accept the hard facts behind such a letter?—that his father should be asking *him* for financial help? With Ruth, Harry had always been rather harsh. "She wasn't bitter," recalls Mary of her aunt, "but she did think Dad gave her some wrong turns, as when he sold a couple of pieces of her favorite family furniture—I seem to remember a child's desk she had, that she loved—to make a little fund out of which he could dole out small amounts for dire necessities. It was that fund his father hoped to tap for the \$2." She continues, "And now and then Ruth would ask for something, though she made do without most of the time. But she deeply regretted he hadn't asked her, had just sold off things she loved to make what she thought was a much less important little stash of money."<sup>lxxvi</sup>

Such an action smacks less of fiscal responsibility than an unfortunate hardness of heart, a simmering anger barely controlled under the best of circumstances—anger toward his father, toward the limited horizons of dusty little Peck and conjoined Wichita, toward the remains of a beloved mother, toward bothersome tasks he was all too prepared to handle, toward tugs of joylessness, the sense of a smudged world that had, in some measure, stenciled itself upon the clean, clear world that might have been. But he had also been hardened even more as a result of family circumstances that now cast him as parent not only to his sister but also to his father, a father whose name he would shortly excise from his own. "He didn't do discipline," Mary writes in her lengthy memoir about growing up a Beecher.<sup>lxxvii</sup> "He didn't know how. It scared or worried him if we misbehaved.... I think he expected Mum to be the enforcer, but she wasn't very good at it, either. Her first mission was to make his life smooth, so her attention to child-rearing had to fit into that. His solution to child-rearing problems was usually anger, often directed at Mum for having somehow been responsible for whatever failing emerged." And yet, she concludes, "He grew irascible, and then he grew distant. But I never doubted that he adored me. He'd say so, that I could be a soothing influence, like Mum, for him. Or he'd like me to be around, reading in the same room or whatever, the way he liked her to be." It is tempting to think he had liked the same of his own mother and sister.

As 1926 rounded into 1927, two new possibilities arose; the first would see him through the spring and summer, and the second would do nothing less than decide his future. After receiving her Master's degree, Mattie Crumrine had left Lawrence in the summer of 1926 to take a teaching position at Highland College,<sup>lxxviii</sup> a small two-year institution located in the town of Highland in Doniphan County in northeast Kansas. In all likelihood, she was very much aware of Harry's mother's death and his subsequent trials. She might have wanted to help or she might simply have desired his company. When,

in May 1927, the accidental death of the head of the science department at Highland left an opening, she would have been well situated to recommend Mr. Unangst and he likely inclined to take the position. He would be joining an old friend, earning a modest salary, and, for the first time, heading a department. That the department was so very small—it consisted mainly of one Mr. Harry Unangst—is, in the end, unimportant. Highland provided a small but lively community and a fresh start that promised better things still.

But something else was in the air. Perhaps Cady, perhaps another of his KU professors, but surely someone close enough to make the suggestion and confident of the answer, asked if medicine were at all interesting to the promising young chemist. If so, Harvard seemed the ideal situation, a school with an excellent faculty, plenty of research facilities, and opportunities not only for laboratory science in the service of the medical arts but also for teaching, an exercise Harry seems to have taken to. (At the time, KU's medical school was, in the words of its own historians, little more than a mess, at "its lowest ebb," its campus "awkwardly divided" between Lawrence and Kansas City.)<sup>lxxix</sup> Were Harry to attempt Harvard—we are unaware of any direct connection between his advisors at KU and the Medical School in Boston, or of his interest in any school except Harvard—he would, however, need some further preparation in the basic sciences (zoology and botany, for instance), needs to which he could attend, after finishing his short stint at Highland, by heading off to Boston in the summer of 1927, there to make his first contacts at Harvard and to enroll in Boston University's short courses in the areas that needed shoring up.

In the 7 January 1927 issue of *Science*, Cady had published a paper entitled "The Chemistry of the Future," the enthusiasm behind which he doubtless conveyed to his students. "We are all looking forward," he wrote, "to most spectacular advances in the overlapping fields of organic chemistry, physiological chemistry and medicine. Modern miracles are happening every day. I suspect that most of us could find in our immediate families or among our close friends individuals alive and in good health who a short twenty-five years ago must have taken the long journey in spite of all the aid which even the best of science could have given them." Such a benign gloss on death—"the long journey"—seems characteristic of the genial and gentle Cady, and the sentiment must have hit close to Harry's heart, his mother having died just three weeks before the article appeared.

Cady had also recognized in Harry's thesis work an originality of thought that merited not only his attention but also that of others. Again, we don't know when the suggestion came, but come it did. Would Harry consider publishing his thesis? Such validation undoubtedly convinced Harry of his place in a much larger world than that which even KU promised. The paper, bearing the same name as the thesis, would appear in *Science* (14 December 1928) with Cady as first author and Harry Unangst Beecher as second. Harry was by that time in his first year of medical school and *Beecher* had replaced *Unangst* as his surname of record.

That Harry had been able to return to his work in Lawrence in the wake of his mother's death must at some level have been a restorative act, perhaps a necessity were he to keep his balance emotionally, psychologically, even spiritually. That Highland College offered a salary as well as a retreat was equally a blessing. In fact, after summering in Boston in 1927 (during which period he sat for his interview at Harvard Medical School) and tending to the guardianship issues surrounding Ruth's circumstances, he returned to Highland to spend the entire 1927-1928 academic year, no doubt to pick up the requisite funds to launch his medical school career<sup>lxxx</sup> and perhaps plan for Ruth's future as well.

## ■ Highland College

"Chemist Arrives," heralded an article in the local newspaper, the *Highland Vidette*, on 21 May 1927, going on to declare that Mr. Harry K. Unangst had been educated at KU, where "he devoted much time to Science and French. Since then he has worked as an industrial chemist, and finished two school years as an instructor in the Chemistry department."<sup>lxxxi</sup> He made a good first impression in his short spring stint, garnering praise for his enthusiasm, his general demeanor, and his academic pedigree. He would shortly leave for the 1927 summer session at Boston University to study botany, a knowledge of which was indicated for admission to Harvard Medical School, and to sit for an interview. Could he have returned to KU for botany? Of course. Could he have applied to medical school in Kansas? Again, yes, though that prospect was probably unappealing given the state of the place at the time. That he chose Boston for his summer excursion and Harvard as his desired end is indicative of a mind at play, a flowering confidence, even some vanity (Harvard's being among the preeminent programs of the day). Perhaps, too, he wished to put even more distance between himself and domestic tangles at home. In all probability, the move also reflects the gentle prodding of his KU mentors, who perhaps envisioned a brighter and broader future for the young man than he himself was even aware of. As for Harvard, Harry's application for admittance was probably no more than a formality, his acceptance all but assured. His academic and professional credentials were excellent, his maturity evident, his character unassailable.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

Intriguingly, the summer of 1927 found Mattie Crumrine touring Europe and studying in France. We should not dismiss out of hand that she, too, had some influence in convincing Harry that Harvard was the place for him. A charming possibility suggests itself in this regard. Mightn't Harry—either in fact or in imagination—have traveled with Mattie on her own journey east, there to disembark for her summer in Europe? Jonathan Beecher's report that his father had gone to Boston partly in pursuit of a girl takes on an appealingly pleasant coloration if we travel the line we imagine for Harry and Mattie.

Highland at the time offered its students a two-year course of study that would prepare them to move on, via a transfer-of-credit agreement with KU and other institutions, to the standard four-year programs in medicine, engineering, law, home economics, education, and business administration.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

There were fewer than a dozen faculty members and the small campus had but two main buildings. The curriculum included courses in the recently-introduced areas of Biology and Home Economics, in Psychology (taught by the President), English (with a professor who had logged time at Columbia), French and Spanish (with Mattie Crumrine), Chemistry and Physics (with Mr. Unangst). History, Mathematics, Sociology, and Bible Studies rounded out the program.

Just a day before the Harry's guardianship petition was granted down in Sedgwick County in mid August, the *Vidette* had noted faculty appointments at the little college up in Doniphan County, among them that of Mr. Harry Unangst. "Mr. Unangst is not entirely new to the College as he taught here a few months last spring, when he was very popular with the faculty and student body." The President of Highland had sought specifically to hire faculty with a "sympathetic attitude toward the type of student enrolled" in the college. What type was that? Mostly children of small rural communities (all but a few of whom commuted), the first in their families to find their way to anything beyond a rather bare-bones secondary school education, of a fundamentalist religious background, and with little disposable income. Every faculty member, the *Vidette* glowingly noted, had a Master's degree. A couple of weeks later, on 15 September 1927, the paper ran a second article entitled "Highland College Prospects Are Good." Harry, it said, came to the college "with the recommendation of being one of the best men receiving the master's degree in chemistry from the University in recent years." He was by that time already a congregant of the Disciples Church of Highland (as was Mattie Crumrine) and was "deeply interested in Christian education." Indeed, a church affiliation for each faculty member was listed and may be presumed a requirement of employment.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

"Today, a general education is not complete without a knowledge of chemistry," declared the Highland *Catalogue* of 1927-1928 in a description that might have been written by Harry himself (influenced perhaps by Cady and his "Chemistry of the Future"). "The subject matter is of fundamental importance toward an understanding of the great scientific phenomena of today. It is required in all courses in Agriculture, Medicine, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Engineering, Aeronautics, Chemical warfare, Household Arts, Nursing, etc." The description continues: "The world is being astounded almost daily by the wonderful new creations of the chemists—new dyes, new perfumes [sic], new textiles, new explosives, new foods, new papers, new varnishes, new lacquers, new medicines, new alloys, etc." Applications for chemistry not just in medical science but in medical practice were probably as yet undefined not only by Highland College but also in one churning and fertile mind.

After his summer at Boston University (he resided in Cambridge, just a few blocks north of Harvard Yard), Harry threw himself wholeheartedly into life at Highland College. He served not only as instructor of science but also as manager of the school's basketball team; he was also "sponsor" of the Sophomore class and served as the faculty presence of the Boarding Club (comprising those students who boarded at the college in exchange for work in the kitchen and perhaps indicating that he too boarded



in)—its motto: “Where girls are girls and men are pigs.” The 1928 *Trailblazer*, Highland’s yearbook, memorialized him with the notice that “ ‘Perhaps’ he’ll get to lunch on time, and ‘Perhaps’ he won’t, but he’s at Chemistry at eight o’clock sharp, every morning. He is certainly right there with the scientific facts—, and his grade book. The Boarding Club is deeply indebted to Mr. Unangst for keeping the mice from the piano and for the musical entertainment he has furnished them.”<sup>lxxxv</sup> Later reminiscences of Harry Beecher, the *éminence grise* of MGH Anesthesia, include references to his daily tea parties for all who cared to drop by his office late in the day, there to chat informally about anything of interest.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> It seems Beecher came early to the idea of an open-house and that it served him well throughout his career. “He is deeply interested in his work,” the account continues, “and his excellent instruction gives his students every advantage.” He was preparing them for transfer to the program that gave him his A.B. and he evidently knew how to provide and get the best from those who filled the 8:00 a.m. classroom chairs.

A diary of sorts published in the *Trailblazer* adds this little bit, bearing the date 25 February 1928: “Kitty, kitty, kitty. Mr. Unangst forgot to call his cats Saturday night and left them in the kitchen. Sunday noon his memory returned....” One can only guess at the joke, good-humored in the giving and no doubt in the getting. The 21 February entry reads: “A treat first thing. Miss Crumrine took us to Europe this morning. Sunny Spain proved much alluring....” Miss Crumrine’s imagination was doubtless thrilling to students who had been no further from home than the classroom she paced. Her *Trailblazer* profile calls us to attention: “See that tall, slender, energetic-looking young woman? That’s Miss Mattie Crumrine.... Quite foreign-looking, isn’t she?”<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Then, after mention of her work in school pageants: “Miss Crumrine’s classes are very popular, because she has a seemingly unlimited fund of information to offer in conjunction with the regular class work. Highland College is mighty glad that she didn’t yield to the charm of any of the Old World senores or monsieurs during her recent visit to Europe.” Highland was mighty glad she didn’t yield to offers in Europe, but she did yield to an offer from her alma mater to return, there to teach for 30-plus years. Harry, too, would be off, his place at Harvard Medical School by this time assured.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

Most likely during Highland’s mid-winter break, Harry, back in Lawrence, arranged for letters of recommendation and the like in support of his application to Harvard Medical School. His summer 1927 studies at Boston University had been duly credited and his formal interview had gone well. “An alert attractive lad,” the interviewer noted, “interested primarily in Bact[eriology] and plans to specialize in this field.”<sup>lxxxix</sup> To this he appended the rather blunt comment, “Does not look foreign.” (We should not make too much of this; Harry wouldn’t have seen this form, there were many members of the Medical School faculty with foreign names and accents, and interviewers often commented on such matters as hygiene and personal appearance.) At any rate, Harry marshaled his forces well, and the application materials were all in place by the end of February 1928.

“At the present time,” he wrote in a personal statement on his admission application, “I have charge of the Chemistry Department of Highland College.... I also teach a five-hour course in college physiology (in addition to the college chemistry courses).” He later embellished: “An emergency has arisen in the college where I instruct, so that it is necessary for me to teach a 5 hour course in physiology. This requires much study and preparation on my part.” Of his own desire for a medical education he noted, “The work leading to my Bachelor’s degree was exerted in getting a foundation in the physical sciences, major in chemistry, having the desire in mind to fit myself for research in some branch of science.” Notable is the lack of any reference to patient care or clinical matters; also surprising is the mention of “some branch of science” when we might expect him to write specifically of chemistry. He continued, “During my senior and graduate years, I instructed (laboratory and recitation work) in the Chemistry Department...at the same time carrying out some research which resulted in my election to membership in Sigma Xi, and the obtaining of a Master’s degree.” He mentioned that he was preparing this research, at the request of Professor Cady, for publication. “Out of this research experience and past courses has grown the desire to do work in biology, especially in bacteriology. In order to fit myself for such research, I hope to get the degree of Doctor of Medicine.” He wrote especially of his desire to work with Dr. Hans Zinsser, Professor of Bacteriology and Immunology, one of Harvard’s laboratory giants (of whom he probably gained some knowledge from his KU instructors and whose textbook he might have used in his undergraduate course). The Harvard reviewers judged his essay “Satisfactory.”

Harry’s declared desire to work in bacteriology rather than chemistry might have been motivated by so personal an experience as losing his mother to pneumonia or by a calculated risk that Harvard would look more interestedly on research in this field than that in another. Whatever the case, there was no doubt about the fact that he was primarily interested in research and, as it turned out, research was indeed his ticket to and through Harvard.

## ■ Becoming Henry K. Beecher

In considering a move to Boston, Harry had evidently come to feel that the family could tend to Ruth’s needs or that Ruth, still down in Wichita, could tend to her own. And Ruth seems to have adapted with aplomb to the unusual circumstances. In 1930, with Harry off at medical school, the Federal Census shows her to be living, a young woman of 17, alone in Wichita (the family supplying the information that she was working at the public library).<sup>xc</sup> The Census designates her as “partner,” an unusual term customarily applied to one in business with another or to a missionary, neither of which describe Ruth at the time. Having yet to reach the age of majority, this designation doubtless reflects her dependency on Harry as guardian and perhaps their joint ownership, each having a one-fourth share, in the rent-generating Kerley farm inherited from their mother. At Harvard, he was started on an upward trajectory,

the limits of which we are still exploring. And of even more import, Harvard was worlds removed from the anchors of responsibility that held him still. One such had since been removed.

In the summer of 1928, in a final act of defiance against his ne'er-do-well father, he had petitioned the District Court of Doniphan County for a change of name. Representing himself through his lawyer as Henry Knowles Beecher Unangst, he would be known thereafter as Harry Knowles Unangst Beecher. (The introduction of the Beecher name seems to have originated with him, not with anyone else in the family.) Knowles, the maiden name of his paternal grandmother had never troubled him; Beecher, the maiden name of his maternal great-grandmother, seems to have intrigued him. Unangst, the name of his paternal line, no longer interested him; it would soon drop out altogether.<sup>xcii</sup> The Court, on 25 August 1928, granted the request. We do not know the evidence he presented, only that it was persuasive enough to effect the change.<sup>xciii</sup> Four weeks later he entered Harvard Medical School as Harry Knowles Unangst Beecher, graduating with the pared down version, Harry Knowles Beecher, the *Unangst* jettisoned entirely. His father never quite forgave him for this slight, commenting that it would have been nice if people knew there was a doctor in the family.<sup>xciii</sup> This self-aggrandizing sentiment elicited, so far as we know, no written comment from his son.

In a rather comical turn, a belabored and perhaps conflicted Harry resorted to near-insurrectionary tactics in identifying the older man. His wedding announcement, printed in the 4 November 1934 "Society" section of the *Boston Herald*, noted that his bride, Miss Margaret Swain, "was graduated from the Winsor School, and from Vassar" and then went on to say that "Dr. Beecher, son of Mr. Henry U. Beecher of Wichita, Kan., is an alumnus of the University of Kansas and the Harvard medical school." Harry, for the eyes of anyone who might chance on the article, had changed not only his but also his father's surname. In an eerily familiar game of one-upsmanship, however (and one that Harry, under other circumstances, might have appreciated), his father would have the final word. His obituary in the 17 May 1957 *Wichita* (Kansas) *Eagle* reads in part: "Henry E. Unangst, 88, of 1026 S. Main, died Thursday in a local hospital.... Survivors include a daughter, Mrs. Ralph Wheeler, Chandler, Ariz.; a son, Dr. Harry K. Unangst, Boston, Mass., a sister..." and so on. So it seems, at least for a moment nearly 30 years later, that locals were reminded that there was indeed a doctor in the family. The doctor's response is unknown; he may not even have seen the notice, and he didn't attend the funeral.

Ironically, though Beecher's relationship with his father had foundered so badly that he went to court to change his surname, he came to assume his father's given name as his name of record. Some posturing was probably at play here, "Henry" appearing, at least in the son's eyes, as a more formal address with which to greet the medical community at large and the academicians to whom, through his scholarship, he would introduce himself.<sup>xciv</sup> "Harry"—so folksily inviting—served well enough locally, both in the social milieu he inhabited and at Harvard and its hospitals. In the end it would also serve well enough for anyone who gained even a measure of familiarity. Within the name resided as well a down-

home flamboyance: “And even though he was eager to make his way in the east, at Harvard and in Boston,” notes his son Jonathan, expressing an opinion shared by many, “he was still proud of being a Kansan, a ‘Harry Truman Democrat’ who was in touch with what he liked to call ‘the mainstream Wichita, Kansas point of view’.”<sup>xcv</sup> Beecher, in truth, probably liked to have it both ways—a Beacon Hill Bostonian, a casual Kansan, the two not as mutually exclusive as they might at first appear.

He was in fact far from finished regarding the name by which the world—friend and foe alike—would know him. Commentators have read much into the switch from *Unangst* to *Beecher*: why the change, what did it afford him? The easy answer has always been that the Beecher name would grant him access to Boston social circles, there being a tinge of romance associated with the famous Connecticut abolitionists, Lyman Beecher (1775-1853), his son Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887), and daughter Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1869). Since the young man in Kansas was some distance from settling his career plans when the Beecher name emerged as an alternative to the distasteful personal associations that weighted his birth name, we can dismiss the notion that he approached the District Court of Doniphan County with a calculating eye, in the gleam of which could be discerned a stratagem for gaining access to the Brahmin gentry in Boston, Massachusetts. If, after establishing himself in Boston, he embraced the name to gain socially (his own in-laws thought him something of a social climber),<sup>xcvi</sup> he was surely guilty of nothing more than another whiff of vanity—*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and “Beecher’s Bibles,” signature elements of the Beecher estate—and a darkly playful sense of humor.

Was he related to Lyman Beecher? No. Did he think he was related? At least at first, he might possibly have entertained the idea; we do not know the family lore he encountered as a youngster regarding his Beecher heritage or the extent to which he internalized it. In an oddly inept if exquisitely contrived attempt at gaining hold of something more than just the name, he contacted Cincinnati’s Lane Theological Seminary—home to Lyman Beecher from 1832 to 1850—to inquire about a portrait of the man. In a letter dated 2 July 1940, he addressed the Trustees, stating, “For a long time I have been aware that the Lane Seminary possessed a portrait of Lyman Beecher, a member of my family....” He offered to buy it, referring thereafter to the Reverend Beecher as a member of “the” family—a significant shift in emphasis.<sup>xcvii</sup> That the Trustees held onto the painting should not surprise us, their claim clearly bumping his. On a family outing, he was still, nearly 20 years later, curious enough about the Beecher connection to check town records in Vergennes, Vermont, the home of his maternal ancestors, but again came up empty (as have others pursuing the same information); there is no indication that he visited Litchfield, Connecticut, the town and county from which the historical Beechers hailed.<sup>xcviii</sup>

Did he play with the Beecher name? *Henry Knowles Beecher*—the name was etched on his desktop name-plate, a clear warning to any whom he might choose to intimidate that he was indeed a serious character.<sup>xcix</sup> In fact, many Beecher families had had a toe-hold in New England for over two centuries, and collateral lines were woefully tangled. As crafty young Harry must soon have realized, if

he could not prove the claim, no one could definitively *disprove* it. Doubtless he himself gained much from entertaining thoughts of abolitionist roots (he named one of his daughters Harriet, in fact). And he was, after all, asserting only a sort of benign paternity to a fanciful story that might entertain more than it instructed. But it was, in truth, only a story. Why the need to tell it in the first place? It is, in one sense, a rather queasy conceit, an exercise in self-invention, but, again, no more or less than that which might engage any of us. A famous name, a famous family—heavy stuff for a wily son of Peck, Kansas intent on creating a more cosmopolitan persona. And he was, after all, a captivating guy of searching intelligence. Those who might have taken him to task would likely do so at their peril, though the peril be nothing more than a kittenish if cagey dare to match him drink for drink at Boston's lordly Somerset Club (where, in all likelihood, the conversation would slacken well before something like the Beecher lineage could be nailed to a certainty).

Just two days after the Court had granted his request for a change of name, he dashed off a letter to Harvard's Dr. Hale, with whom he had met the summer before, explaining, "Because of the difficulty of my last name, the one next to the last and it have been reversed." (Hale had met young man Unangst—Harry K.—but Harry had tendered his application form under the name Harry Knowles Beecher Unangst.) "My name was Harry Knowles Beecher Unangst," he wrote. "It has been changed to Harry Knowles Unangst Beecher."

Harry's birth name was hardly the trip-up he claimed. In truth, there is nothing more difficult in it than in many ethnic surnames—three or four possible mispronunciations, all made right by a simple correction, and surely no more difficult for fair Harvardians than, say, for the folks in Peck, Wichita, Phoenix, Lawrence, and Highland. Closer to the truth is the fact that the name was difficult for *him*, and for reasons we must, of necessity, still guess at. That the family today endorses the notion that Harry wished to separate himself not only from the name but also the man who bore it is reason enough to leave the matter there. Was he conscious of anti-German sentiment in the aftermath of Great War? Perhaps, but surely not to the exclusion of other feelings that rattled him to the core. On his Harvard application, he noted, under the category "Race," that his mother was English and his father (for whom we can plausibly plot a family line back to 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany) French and Dutch. Harry's high school record lists his father as both night watchman and millwright at the Coleman Lantern Company. His father's name is eliminated altogether on his KU Registration Card and transcript, on the latter of which his mother—after her death—again appears as parent of record, this time with the unlikely title (artlessly conveyed by a clearly beleaguered son) of Night Fireman. On the Harvard application, his father returns, this time as an Engineer for the Coleman Company; we have no corroborating evidence for the promotion Harry gives him. If, as has been suggested, the English translation for the imaginary German word *unangst* is something akin to "fearless," Harry, in dealing with his father, was surely at times far from it.

## ■ Home

“He left the Midwest with hardly a backward glance,” concludes his daughter Mary, introducing a hint of something more than just the prospect of a richer, more textured, and colorful life.

In November 1930, midway through his time at Harvard Medical School, Harry returned to Wichita and the Sedgwick County Probate Court to discharge his final duties as Ruth’s guardian. Ruth, having attained the age of majority, was now free to make her own way in the world. In his petition to the Court, he arranged for the sale of his and Ruth’s share of the property they still held jointly with Emma and Mabel Kerley. “To Ruth M. Unangst: - - GREETING: You will take notice that the undersigned, Harry K. Beecher, as your guardian, has filed and presented...his petition as Guardian, asking authority to sell at private sale all your interest in the following described real property, situated in Sumner County, Kansas, to wit....” And so forth. The property was not generating income sufficient to pay the mortgage and other costs. Mabel and Emma, accordingly, purchased both Harry’s and Ruth’s shares for a total of \$3,010.00, each to receive \$1,505.00; Emma paid for her share in cash, Mabel arranging payment in \$50.00/month installments commencing January 1, 1931.<sup>c</sup>

Ruth, fiercely independent, struck out on her own almost immediately—“The family story is,” writes Jonathan, “that she took off for Alaska when she was still in her teens”<sup>ci</sup>—as much of a maverick in her behavior as her brother was to become in his career. “She met and married Ralph Wheeler, who was an army chaplain there. By her own half-joking account, she moved in with Ralph ‘to get warm’.”

Peck, Kansas seems to have served its residents well, but, having fostered and launched a good many of its children, could not possibly have hoped to call them back. To what would they have returned? Mostly to a Depression-era town grown smaller, more home-grown, and, with the eventual decrease in railroad traffic and the dispersion of families, immeasurably less immediate to all but those with strong local attachments. This seems to have been the case with many who came of age in the boom times of the ’teens, ’20s and ’30s, Harry more than most.

After establishing himself in Boston as Henry K. Beecher, he rarely returned to Kansas at all. We know of his trip to introduce his son Jonathan to his father in the early ’50s, but he did not return for his father’s funeral in 1957; in May 1958, he attended commencement exercises at the University of Kansas, receiving a distinguished alumnus award (and planning a lecture entitled “Pain” for the KU School of Medicine).<sup>cii</sup> When his wife Margaret died in 1973, he wrote to his cousin Mabel Kerley, “Since you are the only one from Peck who met Margaret, I am writing to you so that you can tell the others that she died on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October, peacefully and quietly, after a long illness of six years.” He makes no mention of whom he intends by these others or reflects on the distance he had maintained from his Kansas connections. Surprisingly—or not—Mabel was alone in meeting his wife of 39 years.<sup>ciii</sup> Oddly, but

poignantly for someone tendering such personal news, he ends this message of his wife's passing, "Warm regards, Henry K. Beecher, M.D."<sup>civ</sup>

To Emma Kerley, another cousin still residing in Peck, he wrote on 17 March 1975, less than a year and a half before his death, "I hope to get out to Wichita and, of course, Peck, sometime in the spring."<sup>cv</sup> That "of course" is hardly the intensifier it might otherwise have been, and his hope was no more than a fancy, given his own declining health, and is, in the end, unconvincing.

## ■ Epilogue: *Reading Beecher*

Most attempts at getting a bead on Beecher come up short for one reason or another, most likely because he was fiendishly clever at chameleon-like changes, because he was one thing while remaining another. Scholar, perfectionist, showman, colleague, mentor, whistleblower, contrarian, and whatever else—the list is as familiar as the positions he held, the causes to which he gave himself, the goals toward which he worked. Reading Beecher can indeed be an arduous undertaking. "We are concerned, incidentally, with simplicity," he wrote in a 1952 paper. "A method that can function with no apparatus other than a notebook and pencil is manifestly more desirable...than one that requires complex and delicate apparatus which needs calibration by a well-trained physicist." Would that the language, not to mention his readers, attended. A couple of years later, arguing for a common parlance with which to discuss the placebo (another investigator had unwisely used the term "dummy"), Beecher railed gently that if his own preferred terminology fell "a bit short of precision, perhaps the language will have to grow a little to include the new use."<sup>cvi</sup>

Shepherded along by Beecher, the language did grow, as such formulations as "animal of necessity" (to refer to human subjects), "reversible poisoning" (to refer to anesthesia), and "death by inches" (to refer to the experience of the hopelessly unconscious patient) attest.<sup>cvi</sup> And we sense that he relished each, that he was working his way always towards a clearer understanding of that which was, at base, natural, difficult, elusive, even at times somewhat melancholy.

Clearly, medicine gave him broad scope for his far-reaching questions, insights, and concerns, and we cannot quite imagine him as anything other than Doctor and Professor Henry K. Beecher. He was a competent clinician, a born observer, scientist, investigator and explorer, a man with, as his student and then colleague Bucknam McPeck so beautifully puts it, a catholicity of interests.

In a 1946 publication ("Pain in Men Wounded in Battle"), he includes a case report:

*A husky 19-year-old soldier was wounded at the Anzio Beachhead by a mortar shell. Five hours later he was brought into the nearest hospital with a meat cleaver-like wound cutting through the fifth to 12<sup>th</sup> ribs near the vertebral column. He had bled a great deal...and was cyanotic. Obsessed with the idea that he was lying on his rifle, he constantly struggled to get off the litter and complained bitterly of the "pain."*

In a 1947 piece (“Anesthesia’s Second Power: Probing the Mind”), based on a 1946 talk at the Massachusetts General Hospital on the centennial of the first public demonstration of ether anesthesia, he cited the same incident:

*It was just after dark on the beachhead, and a heavy rain was sluicing over the wet canvas of the hospital’s admitting tent. The wet tent flaps had been yanked back with vigor, and several men tried to enter at once. In addition to the wounded man and the two Italian litter bearers, three others were with difficulty holding the wounded man down. He was a husky fellow of 19. “You fools, let me up. Can’t you see I’m lying on my rifle. Get me out of here and off this thing.”*

Clearly, he was putting to good use the lessons he learned in those undergraduate creative writing classes. A case report in a medical article is one thing, a story in a public address is another. We are lucky to have both to bother with, as Beecher, at his luckiest, has us, his students still, to entertain.

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<sup>i</sup> Myron B. Laver, et. al., “Henry Knowles Beecher: Pioneer in Anaesthesiology and Medical Ethics,” *The Harvard Gazette* (January 13, 1978).

<sup>ii</sup> C.E. Welch, “Henry Beecher (obituary),” *New England Journal of Medicine*, 1976; 295 (13), 730. Welch’s “Dr. Cohen” was Dr. Edwin J. Cohn (1892-1953) of Harvard Medical School’s Department of Physical Chemistry; Cohn focused on the physical chemistry of proteins, co-authoring (with Dr. John Edsall) the authoritative *Proteins, Amino Acids and Peptides* (New York: Rheinhold Publishing, 1943). Beecher’s Harvard Medical School file makes no mention of Dr. Cohn. As a first-year student, he was assigned as an advisee to Dr. Alfred C. Redfield of the School’s Department of Physiology where, by his own account, he performed experiments in which he analyzed blood for zinc and worked on haemocryamins. Information from Beecher’s medical school file is cited by permission (see note 67 below).

<sup>iii</sup> Jonathan Beecher, “Notes about Dad and his family after talking with Lola Bell,” 28 August 1977. Handwritten, five pages, unpublished (*JBeecher/Notes*).

<sup>iv</sup> Information about both the Unangst and Kerley families comes from various sources, some public, some private. I have consulted “Some historical matters, in regard to the ancestry, and family name of the writer, John Kerley [son of Hosea Rowe Kerley and Mary (or Mariah) Beecher], New Haven, Conn. – February 1907” (typescript, three pages, unpublished), and Mrs. P.L. (Kay) Kerley Lacy, “Family of Mary Julia Kerley and Henry Eugene Unangst” (undated typescript, two pages, unpublished). Both documents are in the collection of Sheryl (Lacy) Anderson, Kerley family genealogist, and are used by permission. Confirmatory sources include contemporaneous documents such as marriage and death notices, Probate and District Court records, Census enumerations, and the like. Jonathan Beecher, Harriet (Holly) Beecher Field, and Mary Beecher Price, the children of Henry Knowles and Margaret Swain Beecher, have all shared, in correspondence and interviews, ideas and reminiscences about pertinent matters. Mary Beecher Price, in a 16-page unpublished typescript from 1996 (*MBPrice/Reminiscences*), provides an extended examination of her father’s character and interests.

<sup>v</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal communication, 10 March 2006. Every document of record—school transcripts, for example, ranging from Beecher’s high school years to his application to Harvard Medical School—notes Wichita as his place of birth.

<sup>vi</sup> The 1902 Wichita City Directory lists Alice Unangst as living at the address mentioned, information that comports with that from the 1900 Federal Census, which finds her in Ward 3, Precinct 1, working as a servant. Born 13 January 1874, she was the fifth of seven Unangst siblings. (The Wichita City Directory, along with the Index to the 1900 Federal Census for Wichita, can be accessed through the Midwest Historical and Genealogical Society in Wichita, Kansas.)



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vii The Wichita Hospital closed in 1961, having been guided by the Sisters of Saint Joseph since 1925. A delicious irony, given Henry K. Beecher's later advocacy of nurse anesthetists, is the fact that Mother Mary Bernard Sheridan, the nation's first formally trained nurse anesthetist, was the foundress of the Wichita branch of the Sisters of Saint Joseph.

viii The Unangst / Kerley Marriage License (obtained from the Sumner County Historical and Genealogical Society in Wellington, Kansas) was issued by the Probate Court of Sedgwick County, State of Kansas, on 21 January 1899, the ceremony performed just two days later. The License authorizes anyone permitted by law to join in marriage "H.E. Unangst of Peck, Ks, aged 30 years, [and] Miss Mary Kerley of Peck, Ks, aged 29 years...." Then: "I, Marcellus Piatt, a Minister of the Gospel, do hereby certify that in accordance with the authorization of the within License, I did, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of January, A.D. 1899, at Council Hill in Sumner County, join and unite in Marriage the within named H.E. Unangst and Miss Mary Kerley." Piatt was the founding minister of the Council Hill Christian Church, a fundamentalist, non-denominational Protestant community, and was an active participant in Peck's social and religious life. That the couple married at the Council Hill Christian Church rather than Peck's Church of Christ, of which the Unangsts were communicants (*JBeecher/Notes*; see note 3 above), suggests a Kerley family preference. Members of the Kerley family—including Mary Julia, her infant son Eugene, and, in the end, even a wayward husband—are buried in the Council Hill Cemetery, which adjoins the church property, while Unangst family members are buried at the Waco Cemetery. Jonathan Beecher (personal communication, 10 March 2006) and *JBeecher/Notes* (see note 3 above) provide further information on the church affiliation of the two families, as does Mary Price Beecher (*MBPrice/Reminiscences* [see note 4 above]). The Council Hill Cemetery Census can be obtained from the Council Hill Christian Church, 1268 N. Seneca Road, Peck, Kansas, 67120; the Waco Cemetery Census is available through the Midwest Historical and Genealogical Society.

ix Federal Census records track D.B. Unangst throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Other sources, including State Census reports, a marriage affidavit, newspaper notices, a landowners directory, and family documents supply confirmatory details.

x Kerly/"Some historical matters" (see note 4 above). Federal Census records provide confirmatory information as to date of birth.

xi David Kerley's sword evidently captured Beecher's fancy at some point. Over a hundred years after it entered the family, Beecher, then in retirement, remembered it fondly in correspondence with his Kerley relations (a testament, perhaps, to how much he relished stories of his maternal ancestors and to what extent he held such memories dear). Beecher's explication is somewhat muddled: "The sword belonged to our grandfather Kerley, who was born in Vergennes, Vermont. Our g-g-grandfather was there in 1802, how much before that, I do not know. Our g-grandfather was also there and so was our grandfather, who, on account of fighting in the Civil War, got a sword." Henry K. Beecher Papers (H MS c 64), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine (*HKB/Countway*), Box 23, folder 68 (letter to cousin, Emma Kerley, 27 November 1974). Beecher's notion that his great-great-grandfather was in Vermont in 1802 was a fanciful one; no evidence is currently available to support this claim. "Hosea [Rowe Kerley] was married to Mariah Beecher, but no one knows who either of their parents were." Sheryl Anderson (see note 2 above), personal communication, 22 October 2004. Beecher's letter also includes reference to a "beautiful cherry wall secretary with glass doors" (see note 40 below).

xii One such picture, referred to as "The Kerley clan at the old home, Christmas Day, 1910," shows 28 family members, among them Henry Eugene and Mary Julia Kerley Unangst, Harry (then six years old), and Sarah Ann Marshall Kerley (Mary Julia's mother), then 75 years old.

xiii Collateral lines of both the Unangst and Kerley families tangle the documentary record; so, unfortunately for genealogists, do the given names each dealt in. *Henrys* and *Davids* dot the Unangst terrain, as do *Marys* (and *Davids*) the Kerley; *Harriet* was a common Beecher name. Antecedents of the Kerley clan (that of Hosea Rowe Kerley of Vergennes, Vermont) are something of a mystery even to Kerley family historians (see note 11 above). But we do know, from Census and immigration records, that early representatives of the Unangst family, at least one line of which originated in Bodingheim, Baden, Germany, had immigrated to America in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, far in advance of the vast German immigration waves of the next hundred years, and we can develop with a fair degree of certainty a probable line of descent to the Peck Unangsts (starting with a Hans Georg Unangst who, aboard the ship *Christian*, arrived in Philadelphia on 13 September 1749). As the Beechers settled in New England, the Unangsts, like so many of their compatriots, did in Pennsylvania, especially the Montgomery area. And as the Beechers fanned out, so did the Unangsts, their respective stopovers in Illinois likely providing the common ground on which at least their ambitions, if not the two names, were joined.

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<sup>xiv</sup> The 1900 Sumner County, Kansas, London Township record, page 179, ED 366, 14 June. Referenced by Della M. Shafer, Sumner County Historical and Genealogical Society, in a personal communication of 31 March 2006. While Census enumerators of the period did not list local addresses (street name and number), they did record the order in which local families were visited. Henry Eugene and Mary Julia Unangst are listed as the 120<sup>th</sup> family, Sarah Kerley and her two grown children as the 121<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>xv</sup> Index of Marriage Affidavits, available on-line from the Midwest Historical and Genealogical Society. The marriage took place on 16 June 1892; Henry Eugene was 23 at the time.

<sup>xvi</sup> We have no local address for the Henry E. Unangst household and Census records are of no help (see note 14 above). Jonathan Beecher notes that he visited the house in 1977, which, by that time, had been extensively remodeled. "It is two houses north of the house Cousin Mabel [Kerley] used to live in..." (*JBeecher/Notes* [see note 6 above]). The mention of Cousin Mabel's presence is perhaps an indicator that the area became a Kerley family favorite.

<sup>xvii</sup> These designations, recorded by Census enumerators going door to door with pen and paper are somewhat hard to figure, dependent as they are on the testimony of the person being interviewed and the interpretation of those collecting it. "Merchant" and "Salesman" might in fact refer to the same occupation or job. The salient point here is that Henry Eugene made a permanent break from farming, a life he might have considered too common and limiting. As for Henry Eugene's enterprise with the merchant Roll, we have no further information. A contemporaneous photograph catches the Roll and Unangst Building, with the two names prominently displayed, next to the State Bank of Peck and just a few doors down from the Palace Hotel.

<sup>xviii</sup> Of Henry's five sisters, two—Ella and Eliza—drop from sight in Census records (as well as in family notes), presumably after marrying and assuming their husbands' names. Any intercourse the others might have had with them is lost to us. Alice seems never to have married, her gravestone in the Waco Cemetery in Sedgwick County reading "Alys [sic] Unangst," noting her birth date as 13 January 1874 and her death date as 27 December 1952. Beside her lies her brother Charles (7 March 1877 – 14 February 1952). The plot also contains a Mattie Unangst; this was probably Martha, David's first wife, cemetery records noting an 1837 birth date, her death occurring on 23 January 1889. Gertrude, the youngest child of David and Martha, married, on 17 September 1910, a Lawrence W. Parcher. Gertrude, born 3 June 1880, died in January 1964 and is also buried in the Waco plot; her grave is next to that of a Lawrence W. Parcher (presumably her son), born in 1912, his year of death noted as 1944 (see note 8 above). Absent collateral information such as family records or contemporaneous letters, we remain at a loss in locating and following other members of the Unangst family throughout the years.

<sup>xix</sup> My discussion on Peck draws heavily from Rose Ellen Heitman, Ed., *Peck, Kansas: 1878-1987* (Shawnee Mission, KS: KesPrint, Inc., 1987). This celebratory centennial volume runs to 192 pages and includes an extensive bibliography, personal reminiscences, and reprints from archival sources such as newspapers and photo collections; it tells, in chronological order, the history of Peck and its families, industry, social life, and so on. Both the Unangst and Kerley families are noted on several occasions. Most copies of this volume are in private collections but two are more generally available, one at the Kenneth Spenser Research Library at the University of Kansas, the other at the Sumner County Historical and Genealogical Society; both institutions can be accessed by phone or on-line. Jonathan Beecher has provided an additional document, "Early Days in Peck," a two-page unpublished typescript of unknown authorship, details of which dovetail and, in a few instances, expand on information from the Peck Centennial volume. I have also benefited from conversations and correspondence with Roy Parker and Charles M. Kerley of Peck, Kansas, and Rose Ellen Heitman of Clearwater, Kansas. Unless otherwise noted, the incidents, notices, stories, and descriptions I site come from the Peck Centennial.

<sup>xx</sup> A school picture dated 1895 identifies "Unangsts" among the student cohort, names and numbers undetermined. Who these Unangsts were is a mystery. The children of David B. Unangst—Henry Eugene among them—would have been too old, and we know of no other Unangsts in Peck at the time.

<sup>xxi</sup> "Early Care of the Seriously Wounded Man," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, January 27, 1951, 145 (1), 193-200.

<sup>xxii</sup> *MBPrice/Reminiscences* (see note 4 above).

<sup>xxiii</sup> Both the Church of Christ and the Council Hill Christian Church used the baptism by immersion rites (the sacrament being celebrated as late as November in the Ninnescah River) and Harry was so baptized. (Mary Beecher Price, personal communication, 29 June 2006.)

<sup>xxiv</sup> See note 12 above.

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<sup>xxv</sup> *JBeecher/notes* (see note 3 above). His memoir continues, “I looked for the initials today (28/8/77) but could not find them”—they, like the youth who carved them, gone forever.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal communication, 10 March 2006. Jonathan Beecher’s 1950 visit to Peck was the only one he or anyone else in the family made in the company of the adult Harry Beecher. Beecher seems to have wanted his son Jonathan to meet his father Henry Eugene, but this push didn’t extend to include the two Beecher daughters. Jonathan reports occasional visits on his own in later years, when he visited his Kerley relations and gathered such information as he records here.

<sup>xxvii</sup> This language is taken from Beecher’s “The Powerful Placebo,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, December 24, 1955, 159 (17), 1602-1606.

<sup>xxviii</sup> *MBPrice/Reminiscences* (see note 4 above).

<sup>xxix</sup> Orie Kerley, b. 5 November 1897, was the son of Mary Julia’s brother Chauncey Rowe Kerley and his wife, Myrtie Lee Clemmer.

<sup>xxx</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal correspondence, 17 March 2006.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal correspondence, 17 March 2006.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal correspondence, 10 March 2006.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Personal communication from Ruth Unangst Wheeler to Jonathan Beecher, 19 June 1978. Provided courtesy of Jonathan Beecher and used with permission. All quotations attributed to Ruth come from this letter.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> *MBPrice/Reminiscences* (see note 4 above).

<sup>xxxv</sup> For the parrot, *MBPrice/Reminiscences* (see note 4 above); for the canary, Henry Beecher to Margaret Swain Beecher, personal correspondence, 17 January 1944 (*HKB/Countway* [see note 11 above], Box 20, folder 3).

<sup>xxxvi</sup> *HKB/Countway* (see note 11 above), Box 23, folder 36. In 1969-70, a mix-up had prevented Beecher from receiving an order for asparagus roots. After a heated exchange over an eight-month period, N. McCoy of Burpee’s Customer Service Department undercut the gardener. “Sorry about the confusing asparagus,” he wrote the steaming Beecher, “please keep to do with as you will—matter closed!” One matter closes, another opens. On 4 April 1972, an impatient Beecher writes, “On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, I sent you my check and order for Sweet Pea seed; it has not arrived. Will you please get the order to me as quickly as possible.” Given mail time, he had been waiting all of two weeks.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Ruth Unangst Wheeler to Jonathan Beecher, 19 June 1978 (see note 33 above).

<sup>xxxviii</sup> *MBPrice/Reminiscences* (see note 4 above).

<sup>xxxix</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal interview, 19 March 2006.

<sup>xl</sup> *HKB/Countway* (see note 11 above), Box 28, folder 68. In his 1974 letter to his cousin, Beecher goes on: “I would be interested in paying a reasonable sum for [the beautiful cherry wall secretary] if anybody knows where it is.” The secretary remains with the Kerley family in Peck to this day.

<sup>xli</sup> D.B.Unangst died on 23 December 1914, but was, in the 1915 Landowners Directory of Sedgwick County, Kansas, still listed as the owner of the 154-acre farm, then worth \$7,750. (His resting place in the Waco Cemetery in Sumner County is but a short distance from the farm he worked for years.) At the time of his death, it is unclear whether Henry Eugene or any of his other children inherited; his wife Sarah Baxter Unangst lived on in Sumner County until her death on 25 September 1925. Sarah Kerley, his mother-in-law, died on 15 April 1916, perhaps leaving an inheritance gift as well. Her estate settlement is listed as Case #5986 in the Sumner County Probate Court Index. Terms are unclear. Referenced by Della M. Shafer, Sumner County Historical and Genealogical Society, personal communication, 31 March 2006.

<sup>xlii</sup> Henry Eugene’s social connections in Peck were such that he submitted, on 9 October 1918, the following note to a local paper: “H.E. Unangst received a letter from Orie Kerley, who is in France. Orie is having the time of his life. Mrs. Unangst was going to send him a sweater, but Orie says, ‘[N]ever mind sending the sweater, as a Red Cross lady gave me one before I left New York’.” Orie Kerley returned from the war and lived on in Kansas until his death in 1966.

<sup>xliii</sup> Judy Cummings, Historical Society of Clearwater (Kansas), personal communication, 7 June 2006.

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<sup>xliv</sup> “Harry was a big help to our mother,” his sister recalled. “He looked after Lola and me. One of my earliest memories is hearing Harry yell, ‘Help! Ruth has syrup dripping off her elbow!’”—his response to a high-chaired child messily eating cornbread. (See note 33 above.)

<sup>xlvi</sup> Ruth—straightforward, self-confident, honest, and forthright in describing her feelings—was a favorite with the Beecher children, though they saw her infrequently. In her letter to Jonathan (see note 33 above), after the quip that she and her brother never had much in common except the same parents, she adds, “And a deep love for your mother. How I wish I could have known her earlier.” Most likely, practical considerations—their geographical distance from one another, cost of travel, and the like—entered into if not determined the picture, restricting Ruth’s access to her brother and his family. Or perhaps it is not unwarranted to offer the faint suggestion that Harry simply wished to keep his Boston life his own. We do know that Ralph Wheeler, Ruth’s husband, visited the family during the war, when Harry was away, and was a big hit with the children (*HKB/Countway* [see note 11 above], Box 20, folder 5). Family sources—indeed, Ruth herself—readily admit, however, a confused set of emotions between brother and sister; on the one hand, Harry felt protective of Ruth, on the other, he was at times bossy and dictatorial.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Harry’s educational experience was qualitatively different from that of either parent. So far as we know, he was the first on either side to attend an academic high school and was assuredly the first to go off to college. For a lively commentary on the state of American schooling in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Michael West, *Transcendental Wordplay. America’s Romantic Punsters and the Search for the Language of Nature* (Ohio University Press, 2000).

<sup>xlviii</sup> Now Wichita High School East.

<sup>xlix</sup> Mr. John Updegrove, Pupil Accounting, Wichita Public Schools, personal communication, 14 October 2004. Mr. Updegrove kindly supplied a copy of Harry’s General Information Card and his final Report Card.

<sup>l</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal communication, 10 March 2006.

<sup>i</sup> This memory of Ruth’s comports with Lola Stripe Bell’s, Lola’s recollection, as recorded by Jonathan in 1957 (*JBeecher/Notes* [see note 3 above]), being that Harry patronized Wichita’s stylish Wolff’s Clothing Store toward the end of his high school and the beginning of his college years.

<sup>ii</sup> That the report card shows lines for such subjects as Bookkeeping, Stenography, Salesmanship, Mechanical Drawing, Cooking, and Sewing suggests the school offered a comprehensive program, a combination of what we today would term college prep and vocational education.

<sup>iii</sup> Perhaps the photograph was misdated, or perhaps Mary Julia sent Ruth back to Peck in the face of increasing strife at home in Wichita.

<sup>iiii</sup> *JBeecher/Notes* (see note 3 above) and Jonathan Beecher, personal communication, 21 March 2006 both touch on the Phoenix excursion.

<sup>lv</sup> Newspaper article courtesy of Jonathan Beecher.

<sup>lvi</sup> Harry Knowles Unangst, Registration/Enrollment Card, University of Kansas. Courtesy of the Kenneth Spenser Research Library, University of Kansas, and cited by permission.

<sup>lvii</sup> In a letter dated 3 January 1944, Margaret Swain Beecher writes to her husband, away in the war, “A very nice [letter] from your Pa, who sounded really thrilled with pleasure and surprise at his \$10 Christmas donation. I guess I told you I told him you sent me a check for all our presents including his.” *HKB/Countway* (see note 11 above), Box 20, folder 3. Other such notices are also present in this lengthy correspondence.

<sup>lviii</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal communication, 10 March 2006.

<sup>lix</sup> *Annual Catalogue of the University of Kansas, 1922-1923*, p.38. Provided courtesy of Cindy Derritt, Ph.D., University Registrar, University of Kansas, and cited by permission. Such fees, by today’s standards, seem modest indeed. Augmented by other such sources, though, they contributed a significant amount to a budget constantly in need of financial boosts. See also Clifford S. Griffin, *The University of Kansas. A History* (University of Kansas Press, 1974), p. 422.

<sup>l</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal communication, 10 March 2006.

<sup>li</sup> See J.S.Gravenstein, M.D., “Henry K. Beecher: The Introduction of Anesthesia into the University,” *Anesthesiology*, January 1998, 88 (1), 245-253. In examining Beecher holdings at the Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, Gravenstein found “several books Beecher had used in college. In one, dated September 1924, he

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had written in ink the name Harry K.U. Beecher. The name Beecher had been entered over an erasure, which could have been Unangst, the 'U' of which had become a second initial; a faint loop extending down from the erasure could have been the 'g' in Unangst. In other textbooks, the place usually reserved for the owner's name had been cut out." In addition to the books consulted by Dr. Gravenstein in the Wood Library-Museum, others held by the Department of Anesthesia and Critical Care at the Massachusetts General Hospital have the same sort of markings. The time at which he made the erasures and changes is unknown.

<sup>lxi</sup> Bucknam McPeck, "Personal Memories of HKB," in Richard J. Kitz, M.D., ed., *"This Is No Humbug!" Reminiscences of the Department of Anesthesia and Critical Care at the Massachusetts General Hospital* (Boston, MA: The Department of Anesthesia and Critical Care at the Massachusetts General Hospital, 2002), p.93.

<sup>lxii</sup> Harry K. Unangst, Official Transcript, University of Kansas, provided courtesy of Cindy Derritt, Ph.D., Registrar, and the Beecher family; transcript data is cited by permission. In my discussion of Harry's experience at the University of Kansas, I rely as well on information culled from the 1924, 1925, 1926, and 1927 *Jayhawker*, the University's yearbook, obtained from the Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas. The Spencer Library staff also forwarded information on other aspects of life at the University in the 1920s.

<sup>lxiii</sup> For more on the University, see Clifford S. Griffin, *The University of Kansas. A History* (University of Kansas Press, 1974) and Virginia Adams, et. al., *On the Hill. A Pictorial History of the University of Kansas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, revised (University of Kansas Press, 1993), the sources from which I have drawn in this brief description.

<sup>lxiv</sup> Staff at KU's Kenneth Spencer Research Library kindly forwarded information about Miss Crumrine's student and professional life.

<sup>lxv</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal communication, 10 March 2006.

<sup>lxvi</sup> For the Beecher/Cady correspondence, see *HKB/Countway* (note 11 above), Box 1, folder 48.

<sup>lxvii</sup> Beecher's student files at Harvard Medical School, including his application materials, have to date gone unexamined. I cite to these files by permission of the Registrar, who kindly provided complete access to them. In support of his application to Harvard, Harry Unangst (he had yet to change his name to Beecher) solicited letters from, among others, members of both the KU German and French Departments, the first of whom stated, "I am confident that [the applicant's] knowledge of German is sufficient for purposes of research in this [i.e., the scientific] field," the second of whom attested to his having attained a competent reading knowledge of French.

<sup>lxviii</sup> The 23 March 1929 letter to Dean Edsall is part of Beecher's Harvard file; the newspaper mention appears in the 21 May 1927 issue of the *Highland Vidette*; the family notice comes from Jonathan Beecher in a personal communication of 19 March 2006.

<sup>lxix</sup> Harry's Harvard Medical School application, received on 7 February 1928, contains a personal statement in which he rehearses his work as both an undergraduate and graduate student at KU, going on to say that "Out of this research experience [in chemistry] and past courses [in the sciences generally] has grown the desire to do research work in biology, especially in bacteriology." This sentiment echoes that which he had already expressed the previous summer when he interviewed at Harvard Medical School in the summer of 1927. "An alert attractive lad interested primarily in Bact[eriology] and plans to specialize in this field," noted the interviewer (probably Dr. Worth Hale, Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Medicine) on 6 July 1927.

<sup>lxx</sup> For Cady, see John H. McCool, Department of History, University of Kansas. "High on Helium." *This Week In Kansas History* ([www.kuhistory.com](http://www.kuhistory.com)), ed., Henry Fortunato, October 3, 2002. University of Kansas Memorial Corporation. Retrieved May 1, 2006 from <http://www.kuhistory.com/proto/story.asp?id=104>. For Bailey, see Editors, Department of History, University of Kansas. "Who Would Command Greater Respect?" *This Week in Kansas History* ([www.kuhistory.com](http://www.kuhistory.com)), ed., Henry Fortunato, April 11, 2005. University of Kansas Memorial Corporation. Retrieved May 1, 2006 from <http://www.kuhistory.com/proto/story.asp?id=333>.

<sup>lxxi</sup> Editors, KUhistory.com., "Bacteriology to the Future", *This Week in KU History* ([www.kuhistory.com](http://www.kuhistory.com)), ed. Henry J. Fortunato. April 1, 2005. University of Kansas Memorial Corporation. Retrieved July 16, 2006 from <http://www.kuhistory.com/proto/story.asp?id=332>. Barber had developed other instrumentation as well. "Using all three of his micro-implements—the pipettes, the manipulators and the injectors—Barber successfully implanted foreign microorganisms into various types of plant cells. And when the cells died, Barber was able to show that they possessed no internal defense against microorganisms; that instead, plant cells rely on their comparatively thick outer walls to protect them against bacteria."

<sup>lxxii</sup> Mary Beecher Price, personal communication, 29 June 2006.

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<sup>lxxiii</sup> For the Council Hill Cemetery census, see note 8 above.

<sup>lxxiv</sup> *JBeecher/Notes* (see note 3 above).

<sup>lxxv</sup> The Petition for Guardianship, a public document, is filed in the Probate Court of Sedgwick County, Kansas. (Copy courtesy of Della M. Shafer, Sumner County Historical and Genealogical Society.)

<sup>lxxvi</sup> Mary Beecher Price, personal communication, 17 April 2006.

<sup>lxxvii</sup> *MBPrice/Reminiscences* (see note 4 above).

<sup>lxxviii</sup> Now Highland Community College, 606 W. Main, Highland, KS 66035. The institution had become a two-year college in 1922 when the junior and senior year programs were discontinued for financial reasons; at that time it was known also as the North East Kansas Junior College. Historians note that students could trade work for tuition, the girls confined to cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry, while the boys did the heavy cleaning and tended to dairy cows, pigs, and poultry. (See note 81 below.)

<sup>lxxix</sup> For the story of the University's School of Medicine, see John H. McCool, Department of History, University of Kansas, " 'We Can't Lose the Medical School' " (January 17, 2005) and "Wahl on the Fly" (January 15, 2005). *This Week in Kansas History* ([www.kuhistory.com](http://www.kuhistory.com)), ed., Henry Fortunato. University of Kansas Memorial Corporation. Retrieved April 17, 2006 from <http://www.kuhistory.com/proto/story.asp?id=326> and <http://www.kuhistory.com/proto/story.asp?id=327>, respectively.

<sup>lxxx</sup> Expenses for Harvard Medical School were unlike any with which he had to deal at KU. It would take a deposit of \$50.00 to hold his place were he accepted, the sum to be applied to his first term bill. Harvard in 1928 was charging its students a \$5.00 matriculation fee, a \$400.00 "instruction" fee, and other incidental expenses—for the purchase of a microscope, for instance; rooms available at Vanderbilt Hall went for \$135-\$300, with meals served at reasonable prices. For fees charged by HMS, see the 1928-1929 *Harvard Medical School Catalogue*, Vol. 25, No. 43 (31 October 1928). In fact, Harry's file is filled with requests for grant and fellowship support as well as for loan support; a testament to his ingenuity and success, he never was refused an academic grant for which he applied. He managed his way through a thicket of expenses by supplementing his income with outside work and loan monies, even realizing rather hefty amounts from the sale of his blood. Any hope that his Highland salary would stand him in good stead was more or less dashed when the financially-strapped institution didn't pay him the final \$600-plus that it owed him at the time of his departure, a fact to which he adverts in his Harvard appeals for tuition help and living expenses.

<sup>lxxxi</sup> Further information about Harry's work as an industrial chemist escapes us. See note 68 above.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> In the late 1920s, Harvard Medical School readily admitted students not only from so-called prestigious institutions of the day but also from a variety of independent and state schools across the country (in fact, at Harvard as at other medical schools an undergraduate degree was not always a prerequisite for admission). John H. Talbott, a 1929 magna cum laude graduate of the Medical School, hailed from Grinnell College in Iowa. Talbott and Beecher were considered among the best that Harvard had in the 1920s and '30s and both went on to distinguished careers. In an interview late in life, Talbott commented, "In my book Harvard was the only place to go. Getting in was easy in those days. I still have my postcard of acceptance." See N.Y. Hoffman, "John Talbott, M.D.: editor and innovator," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 20 May 1983; 249 (19), 2606-2607.

<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Information on Highland College, on Harry Unangst's time there, and on Mattie Crumrine's experience is taken from *The Highland Vidette* (dates as noted within), *The 1928 Trailblazer* (Highland's yearbook), the 1927-1928 *Catalogue*, and documents pertaining to the history of the college, among them Arlyn Parish, *History of Highland Community College* (published locally, 1983), all provided courtesy of Brenda S. Hines, English Department, Highland Community College and used by permission; Dr. Craig Mosher, Executive Assistant to the President, Highland Community College, also contributed information.

<sup>lxxxiv</sup> The Disciples Church in Highland, like the Council Hill Christian Church in Peck, was a non-denominational Protestant community. Its official name was Highland Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. In joining this church, Harry was following more in his mother's than father's footsteps.

<sup>lxxxv</sup> The particular joys of the piano accompanied Harry from youth, continuing with him through college and into adulthood. "He loved to play the piano," writes Mary Beecher Price (*MBPrice/Reminiscences*; see note 4 above), "and have us sing along: 'Beautiful Dreamer,' 'Grandfather Clock,' anything by Stephen Foster, 'Whispering Hope,' various pieces out of the *Mammoth Collection of American Songs*." She goes on to mention that he "loved torch singers, too: Hazel Scott, 'Sentimental Journey,' 'Near You,' any of these could bring him to reverie." Reverie

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of what?—some parcel, at least, of a happy adolescence, or a happiness of mind in the midst of a difficult adolescence? It is a lovely thought to entertain—young Harry Unangst’s serenades reaching out from Peck, the little town he left, to touch his—Harry Beecher’s—heart in Boston, the big town to which he went. “He taught us to dance...[and] if something came on the radio, he’d take Mum or one of us and swoop around the room. His eyes sparkled those times. They were joyful moments.”

<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Bucknam McPeck, M.D., “Personal Memories of HKB,” p. 95. (See note 61 above.)

<sup>lxxxvii</sup> The picture of Mattie Crumrine in the 1928 *Trailblazer* gives a hint of a rather more haunting beauty, understated but alluring.

<sup>lxxxviii</sup> We have no evidence that Harry Beecher continued his relationship with Mattie Crumrine after the Highland College experience. Perhaps there were some letters, but these are lost to us.

<sup>lxxxix</sup> See note 69 above.

<sup>xc</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal interview, 19 March 1906. Jonathan comments that Ruth’s children made reference to this fact.

<sup>xci</sup> Beecher rarely spoke much of his Unangst forbears in discussions with his children. Whatever they learned evidently came from their personal interactions with relatives and these were limited to only a very few visits over the years. The Beecher children, though thoroughly taken with their aunt Ruth and her husband, for instance, asked little of their father’s family’s circumstances until after his death. Jonathan Beecher, personal interview, 19 March 2006.

<sup>xcii</sup> The language of the District Court of Doniphan County reads in part: “Thereupon the applicant introduced his evidence and rested, and there being nothing further[,] the court doth find...that there is reasonable ground for the change of name as set out in the petition.... IT IS THEREFORE CONSIDERED ORDERED AND ADJUDGED BY THE COURT that the applicant Harry Knowles Beecher Unangst’s name be changed to Harry Knowles Unangst Beecher.

<sup>xciii</sup> *JBeecher/Notes* (see note 3 above).

<sup>xciv</sup> In fact, he began signing formal correspondence “Henry K. Beecher” at some point during his third year at Harvard Medical School. Documents in his Harvard file before that period bear the name “Harry K. Beecher” and occasionally “Harry K.U. Beecher.”

<sup>xcv</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal communication, 3 March 2006.

<sup>xcvi</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal communication, 17 March 2006.

<sup>xcvii</sup> *HKB/Counway* (see note 11 above), Box 23, folder 29.

<sup>xcviii</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal communication, 10 March 2006; Mrs. P.L. Lacy to Jonathan Beecher, letter dated 5 August 1977; Sheryl Anderson, personal communication, 26 October 2004.

<sup>xcix</sup> Dr. Richard J. Kitz, personal communication, 29 March 2006: “It was when [in 1969] he observed me looking at the name plate on his desk which had all three names [Henry Knowles Beecher].... He then told me he was related to Harriet Beecher Stowe, watching me closely. I don’t recall how I responded.... I wondered much later...whether he was just ‘tossing’ it out to gauge my reaction.” On the other hand, in “Henry K. Beecher: The Introduction of Anesthesia into the University,” *Anesthesiology*, January 1998, 88 (1), 245-253, Dr. J.S. Gravenstein writes, “Once I asked Beecher whether he was related to Harriet Beecher Stowe.... He denied a blood link with her illustrious Beecher family. Beecher mentioned that the name Unangst was in his family.” In a personal communication of 26 January 2006, Dr. Gravenstein sagely adds that Beecher “might have allowed misapprehensions to persist as long as not asked a direct question.” Dr. Gravenstein’s comment comports nicely with one offered by Jonathan Beecher (personal communication, 10 March 2006): “I don’t remember Dad ever claiming that we were direct descendents of the famous Beechers, though I imagine he liked people to think so.” Commentators have unwittingly stumbled over this Beecher business, in all likelihood inheriting, or inventing, commonplace fictions. See, for instance, the unfortunate Jon M. Harkness, writing in *American National Biography*, Vol. 2, John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, General Editors (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 265: “In 1928 Henry left Kansas to enter Harvard Medical School. But, before leaving, he changed his surname to Beecher.... He was, in fact, related to the famous abolitionist Beecher clan through his maternal grandmother, Maria Kerley, whose maiden name was Beecher.” In fact, he was not: his maternal *great*-grandmother’s maiden name was Beecher; his maternal grandmother was born Sarah Ann Marshall, and his mother was born Mary Julia Kerley. (And, in 1928, “Henry” was still “Harry.”) See

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also David J. Rothman, *Strangers at the Bedside. A History of How Law and Bioethics Transformed Medical Decision Making* (Basic Books, 1991), p. 70: “Although the family name is a famous one in American history...Henry’s branch had not prospered.” The family name was, of course, not Beecher at all, but Unangst.

<sup>c</sup> The summary document in this matter, “Certificate of Official Character,” states: “I, J. D. Dickerson, Sole Judge and ex-officio Clerk of the Probate Court of Sedgwick County, in the State of Kansas, it being a Court of Record, and having the custody and control of its files, record and seal, do hereby certify that the instruments hereto attached are full, true and correct copies of Petition for Guardianship; Oath; Bond; Letters, Petition to sell real estate; Order to Sell real estate; Order to give Notice; Notice; Proof of service of notice to Minor; Bond of guardian on Order of Sale; Order approving bond; Report of Sale; Appraisal; and Order confirming Sale in the matter of the estate of Ruth M. Unangst, a minor, as the same appears of record and the files of this Court. I further certify that the Letters are in full force and effect at this time.” The matter was concluded on 13 January 1931. It is filed as Case #6860. Copy courtesy of Della M. Shafer, Sumner County Historical and Genealogical Society.

<sup>ci</sup> Jonathan Beecher, personal communication, 10 March 2006.

<sup>cii</sup> *HKB/Countway* (see note 11 above), Box 24, folder 18.

<sup>ciii</sup> This one visit occurred not in Kansas but in Massachusetts, when Mabel had come, at some point in the 1950s, to stay with the Beecher family at their home in Milton while being treated for eye problems; fondly remembered, it was she who had entertained Jonathan on his trip to Peck, taking him fishing for perch and catfish. Jonathan Beecher, personal communication, 10 March 2006.

<sup>civ</sup> *HKB/Countway* (see note 11 above), Box 23, folder 68 (letter to cousin Mabel Kerley, 5 November 1973). We have the typescript in mimeograph form; over the formal signature on the original, he might very well have signed off with the more personal “Harry.”

<sup>cv</sup> *HKB/Countway* (see note 11 above), Box 23, folder 68.

<sup>cvi</sup> See “Experimental Pharmacology and the Measurement of Subjective Response,” *Science*, August 15, 1952, 116 (3002), 157-162, and “The Powerful Placebo,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, December 24, 1955, 159 (17), 1602-1606, respectively.

<sup>cvi</sup> For “animal of necessity,” see “Experimentation in Man,” *Journal of the American Dental Society of Anesthesiology, Inc.*, June-July 1959, 6 (6), p. 5: “Recent developments in human biochemistry and pharmacology have proved that man is the ‘animal of necessity’.” For “reversible poisoning,” see “The Anesthetist as Physician,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 6, 1964, 88 (1), p. 171: “...physician-anesthetists have realized that not only are they specialists in what might be called reversible poisoning but they...” For “death by inches,” see “Ethical Problems Created by the Hopelessly Unconscious Patient,” *The New England Journal of Medicine*, June 27, 1968, 278 (26), p.1426.