



# Agatha!

Agatha Snow Abroad: A Sketch Book from her  
1912 European Tour

Susan Snow Lukesh

SECOND EDITION

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1912 European Tour

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This Second Edition, in addition to correcting small mistakes, updates/adds two stories: 1) who was Delano Whistler (Illustration 42) and 2) the last tragic deaths which can be said to be caused by the Titanic with the implosion of the submersible Titan in 2023 (p. 98).

Cover Image

Agatha, captioned "An Artist." From an early 20th century Snow family album of Kodak photos.

# CONTENTS

Illustrations vii

Foreword xi

Preface xiii

Prologue xvii

Preparing for the Journey 1

Titanic 7

The Sketch Book: Europe Bound 11

The Sketch Book: Europe 29

The Sketch Book: Homeward Bound 85

Postscript: After the Sketch Book 93

Epilogue 101

Itinerary 103

Acknowledgements 105

Bibliography 107

Notes on the Text 111

## Illustrations

- 1 *The SS Rijndam* 11
- 2 *Introducing Billy Wallace* 11
- 3 *Introducing Frances, Billy's Wife* 13
- 4 *Dr Jennings and Billy Storytelling* 14
- 5 *Cabine de Luxe* 14
- 6 *Un peu d'animal bleu!* 15
- 7 *Introducing Suzanne Cutler Bagley Wallace* 16
- 8 *Frances and Porcupusses* 17
- 9 *Mr. Bourgeois* 17
- 10 *Mother & Children?* 18
- 11 *The Boob and Lunch* 18
- 12 *The Boob in Mexico* 19
- 13 *The Turkey-Trot* 20
- 14 *They Looked upon the Wine* 21
- 15 *Champagne Bottle* 21
- 16 *The Departure from the SS Rijndam* 23
- 17 *The Departure on a Tug* 24
- 18 *Various Players Departing the SS Rijndam* 25
- 19 *Last View of Esther* 26
- 20 *Pauline Chaperoned at Last* 27
- 21 *The Elusive Eluded Us Forever* 28
- 22 *Rotterdam* 29
- 23 *Hotel de Cráut* 29
- 24 *The Baby Incubator* 30
- 25 *Beers at Coblentz* 32
- 26 *Military, Coblentz* 32
- 27 *To Bingen* 33
- 28 *Postcard: Bingerbrück, Bingen und Niederwald* 33
- 29 *Weisses Ross Inn* 36
- 30 *Morning Coffee* 37
- 31 *Stolid Germans Convulsed* 38
- 32 *Leanore, adieoo-ooo-ooo!* 39
- 33 *Postcard: Dresden Theaterplatz* 41
- 34 *It's All Sausage to Me* 42
- 35 *Lady Street Cleaner and Lady Taxi Chauffeur* 43

*Agatha!*

- 36 Postcard: Nürnberg 44  
37 Postcard: Greeting from Rothenburg 45  
38 Changing of the Caps 46  
39 April 1912 Postcard: Kufstein 47  
40 Five Fat Funny Females Left at Botzen 48  
41 1829 Print & Detail of Meran and Castle Tyrol 49  
42 Young Americans Abroad 49  
43 Chic Italian Bathing Costume 50  
44 Postcard: Basilica di Santa Maria della Salute 51  
45 Officer of the Italian Cavalry 52  
46 Afraid to Hunt Alone 53  
47 Indwellers of Palazzas on the Grand Canal 54  
48 Postcard of Gondolas that Agatha Might Have Sent 55  
49 Hindoo Prince and a Mania for Photography 56  
50 Puzzles 56  
51 Nave Asilo Scilla 57  
52 A Venetian Sunrise 58  
53 J Durham Right-side Up 58  
54 Nurse and Bambino 59  
55 Mountain Goat, Switzerland 60  
56 Postcard: Zermatt 60  
57 In the Land of William Tell 61  
58 Horse Tail Guards 62  
59 Bois de Boulogne, Paris 63  
60 Postcard: Bois de Boulogne 64  
61 Café Riche Ladies 64  
62 Ca. 1905 Postcard: Entrance to Café Riche 65  
63 Notre Dame Religious Woman 66  
64 Mrs. Campbell and the Cockroaches in the Cabin 67  
65 Postcard: The Royal Courts of Justice 68  
66 A.B.C. London 69  
67 Messenger Boy, London 70  
68 Trooping the Colour 71  
69 Detail of Guard on the Right 72  
70 Hyde Park 72  
71 Rotten Row 73  
72 Postcard: SS Lapland 74  
73 Postcard: Leicester Hospital & West Gate, Warwick 74  
74 The Town Crier and A Brother of Leicester Hospital 75

*Illustrations*

- 75 The Meat of the Kangaroo 77*  
*76 Porlock Pharmacy 78*  
*77 Renovated Railway Car 79*  
*78 Postcard: Cliff Railway, Lynton 80*  
*79 Salisbury Steak 81*  
*80 Have You Seen Hunter? 82*  
*81 Postcard: A Promenade on the "Midway" 84*  
*82 SS Minnewaska 85*  
*83 Mackinaws are Just the Thing 85*  
*84 The Man Who Swallowed the Hatpin 87*  
*85 A Comedy in Four Acts 88*  
*86 Agatha's Oct. 1952 Letter in Three Scenes 89*  
*87 What! Not Sick After Last Night? 90*  
*88 Shuffleboard on the Afterdeck 91*  
*89 Last Looks 92*

## Prologue

On the appointed day in early November 1911, Robert Snow Jr. and Oliver Prescott Jr. hid behind the black horsehair sofa in the parlor of Sarah Hunt Snow's house on Orchard Street, New Bedford, Massachusetts. The sofa was formal and uncomfortable to sit on but provided an excellent hiding place for two thirteen-year-old boys. Soon Arthur Willis Blackman was escorted into the parlor where he waited the arrival of Constance Snow, oldest child of Sarah Hunt Snow. Having secured her mother's approval, Arthur was there to propose marriage to Constance.

Oliver, who would later serve as lawyer for Sarah until her death, picks up the story, when he wrote in 1980 to Robert Snow's widow, shortly after Robert's death.<sup>18</sup>

Together we hid behind the huge sofa in the West portion of Mrs. Snow's sunny parlor upon which Arthur Blackman arrived with a bouquet of violets and was proposing to Constance Snow, all dressed up, pretty as a picture and flushed with excitement and then popped out at what we considered a psychological moment and shouted "Boo!"

Constance's daughter, my mother, would often tell the story of Agatha, younger sister of Constance, who took to her bedroom for a week after the proposal. Was she sulking because she wasn't getting the attention? Or was it because she imagined the attention that her older sister would get during the engagement and wedding? We have no way to know, although my mother came down firmly on the side of Agatha's no longer having what she thought was suitable attention. Oliver attests to Agatha's personality in his letter when he describes the family over a half century earlier:

I remember Agatha with artistic gifts, capabilities and a difficult personality; Edith - warm and with rather horrendous homeliness; and little black-clad Mrs. Snow - alive, wiry and high-strung - who used to call me at my office: "Oliver! This is your old trouble Mrs. Snow. I must see you!" Long ago and far away!

Ultimately the difficulties of living with Agatha forced Sarah to ask her to leave the family home and find her own place to live in New Bedford, from which she continued her work as an interior designer and decorator. Agatha was an artistic and bright yet difficult young woman; thinking of her today evokes *The Sound of Music*: "How to solve a problem like Maria?"

Indeed, how to solve this problem of Agatha after her sister's engagement? Focus Agatha on something that is hers and will consume her energy and time, leaving Constance to the world of engagement parties and plans for the wedding and her future married life with lawyer Blackman. And so, we surmise, a plan was hatched to send Agatha and companions to Europe for three months. From this problem and Agatha's artistic gifts, the small travel sketch book<sup>19</sup> remains to assist in tracing the trip from mid-April to early August 1912 and show us her creativity, providing enjoyment and amusement, and education, well over a century later.



## Epilogue

Now that we have followed Agatha and her companions through more than three months in Europe and attempted to answer the questions her images and comments provoke, it may have become clear to some readers that I have followed Thornton Wilder in his desire “to pile up a million details of daily living ... it is the business of writing to restore that sense of the whole.”<sup>1</sup> As an archaeologist myself, I concur in his opinion—drawn from his formative experience studying archaeology in Rome—of the archaeologist’s eyes:

An archaeologist’s eyes combine the view of the telescope with the view of the microscope.

He [or she] reconstructs the very distant with the help of the very small.<sup>2</sup>

As an archaeologist, I attempted to imagine past lives through what remains, taking seemingly mundane items—broken pieces of pottery—and proposed reconstructions of the lives of people thousands of years dead. And I suggest that this attempted reconstruction of Agatha’s 1912 European tour has taken seemingly small mundane items and events and worked to restore a sense of the whole. As indicated earlier, to restore a sense of the whole with facts such as train schedules and ocean crossings and knowledge of the families woven together with supposition and conjecture is a much easier job than singing the lives of prehistoric people (with no written records) out of the potsherds and stone foundations left behind. I suggest that these activities and my archaeological work imagines and assembles and reconstructs histories or past lives from the fragments we have been left. And this reconstruction of stories allows us to honor the dead and their lives.

As a teen-ager I was struck by a quote of Evgeny Evtushenko with which, even at that age, I profoundly disagreed, yet had no idea what course my own interests would take. I used Evtushenko’s words as an epigraph to a poem I composed from a story my grandmother had told me—a poem that was in direct contradiction to Evtushenko, who wrote “They perish. They cannot be brought back. The secret worlds are not regenerated.” I share that school-girl poem here, honoring my grandmother, Constance, who, after all, is the older sister of Agatha and whose engagement apparently caused the plan to send Agatha to Europe. I suggest that both a reconstruction of Agatha’s trip and, after Constance read a previous poem of mine now lost, her sharing the story of her father waking her in the middle of the night prove that, in some fashion, parts of previous lives can be brought back and parts of their worlds regenerated. So today, as a genealogist, I continue to work to regenerate parts of the worlds of the four centuries of my ancestors in this country.

---

<sup>1</sup> Wilder, 153.

<sup>2</sup> Wilder, 154.

## My Mother's Mother

"We who knew our fathers  
in everything, in nothing.

They perish. They cannot be brought back.  
The secret worlds are not regenerated."

Evtushenko

Braced by an arm against the cherry desk,  
Invincible, though old and stooped and deaf, she speaks.  
She's young again with memories and thoughts:

*Asleep, my father gently bids me wake,  
(Words and year are blackened spaces in my mind,  
This moment though brought back by your poem.)  
Now at the stair window I press my face  
and see through wispy topaz clouds – chased  
by windy phantoms – an Olympian,  
autumnal moon. Below, across, above,  
untamed geese, arrow-strict, divide the night.*

Her voice drops off, there's nothing left to show ...  
The young girl ages swiftly and disappears.  
The picture, though, inspired by my school-girl's poem,  
is no longer hers alone,  
and transmits a corner of her world to me,  
an ungenetic immortality.