

Draft Story Woman who bought home 9 dollars a week

Post Papers - Box One - Bennett, Grant Press Correspondent

## Who Bought a Home

Lena Stark was a student in the Albion Business College in 1895, and in the summer was sent to Battle Creek to fill a position in a publishing house. She had not as yet completed her course, but was the most advanced student in her class.

She was at this time seventeen years of age, and in December was advised that there was a better position open with the Postum Cereal Co., which was then a very small concern. One night after working hours she went to the home of Mr. C. W. Post and applied for a position. Coming there before the supper hour, Mr. and Mrs. Post insisted on her eating supper with them, and afterward Mr. Post took her out to the little office, and dictated two letters to her to see her work. As she says now, he dictated them very slowly and carefully, and even a beginner could have taken the letters, but he was satisfied with her work, and started her in his office the next Monday morning at \$5 per week. The second week her salary was advanced to \$6 per week. At that time the office force consisted of Mr. Post, a bookkeeper and herself. The office at that time was in one of the cottages on the property which had been purchased by Mr. Post. Her duties, besides the stenographic work, were to sweep and dust the room and fill the lamps, as at that time they had no gas nor electricity. Miss Stark was the first stenographer employed by the Postum Cereal Co., where today they number into the hundreds. She was an absolute stranger in the city, and at first lived in a boarding house, where she paid \$3.50 per week for room and board. As the business increased her salary was raised in proportion.

Her mother was a widow living in Albion, her father having died when Miss Stark was seventeen months old, and the mother and children knew what it was to economize and save. Her plan was to save something each week out of her wages, no matter how small.



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When Mr. Post advised his employees that he would build them homes and sell to them on the easy payment plan, Miss Stark purchased a double lot for \$195. and paid for it. Then Mr. Post built her a house on it which cost her \$700. and she rented it at once at \$6. per month, turning the rent back into the Postum Co. together with what she saved each month toward the payment for her home.

In 1899 Mr. Post built her the second house on her double lot, which cost her about \$300. more to build than the first house, on account of the increased cost of material, so that the two homes cost her about \$1750. They now rent for \$12. a month each, and have had tenants in them ever since they were built.

In 1898 she purchased two more lots on Post Ave., held them a year and sold them at an increase over the cost of \$150. In 1905 she bought her present property at 225 South Avenue, and paid for the lots. She then borrowed money from the Postum Cereal Co. and built her present home, which cost her \$2500.00. This little home is on a lot 50 feet front by 160 feet deep, and is finished in hard wood, and would bring \$3500.00 today if put on the market. At present writing Lena Stark owns three homes in Battle Creek, has some money in the bank, and is not a regular employee of the Postum Cereal Co., as she is now married and keeping house. Her salary the last year she was with the Postum Co. was \$75. per month. During the summer she acts as relief for the girls when they take their vacations, and works at the Postum plant when extra help is needed and she can be spared from her home.



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I went to Battle Creek, Michigan, to visit a friend. I had not been there twenty minutes until he began telling me about Battle Creek's best known product - C. W. Post - the man who makes Postum and several other well known brands of breakfast food. That afternoon he took me across the car tracks to see how Postum and Grape Nuts were made, and that is how I met Lena Stark, a stenographer; but that is getting ahead of my story.

Caught under the brow of a hill is the first building that C. W. Post, when forty-two years old and in ill health, used in making Postum. He used a skillet and a peanut roaster. That was all he had except belief in himself and a square chin. But when a person has those two things it does not make any difference if the building is a barn.

He rolled bran and wheat over and over in his peanut roaster, testing and testing until he found a combination that could not be told from coffee with a bandage over your eyes. He had something that tasted just as good as coffee, named Postum, a drink that didn't keep one kicking around half the night. All he now had to do was to sell it - he just had to carry the bricks up to the top of the building where somebody else would do all the work of laying them. There is a lot of difference between having something to sell, with the accent on the to, and getting it on half the breakfast tables in the land. Buy anyway it did sell so that today the man who came to Battle Creek seventeen years ago, now owns ten acres of factory buildings, a hotel, an office building, a theatre, a townsite and part of the town. My Battle Creek friend whispered into my ear that his income, whether he sat at his desk with his sleeves rolled up or played Shuffleboard on his yacht was \$40,000 a week.

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The offices didn't look like offices; didn't smack of the treadmill where most employees have to stay six days a week to get an envelope on Saturday afternoon at three. Coming up the hill they looked like a houses where a man of means lived whose hobby was his lawn: Colonial architecture, vines and a home air that set you looking for the hammock. Inside it was still more of a home and yet an office; beautiful rugs, big leather chairs and an art gallery. In the midst of the office I found Lena Stark, as cheery as a hostess and as busy as a bee. In a moment we were chatting as though at a reception:

"How long have you worked here?" I asked.

How it was possible for a girl on a low salary to own three homes interested me deeply, so deeply that I could not help asking questions. From one of the managers I found out about G. W. Post's method of working with his employees. Strickly speaking he is not in favor of unions but he is in favor of the workingman. In fact, he has had several tiffs with organized labor but every single employee in his shops is his loyal booster. While there I met J. W. Bryce high up as an organized union worker who could not say enough for the Post system of protecting its employees.

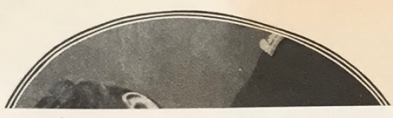
Post goes on the theory that an employee does his best work when he has responsibility on his shoulders. As soon as a man has worked for him a year he is willing to take him into partnership - willing to sell him a home. To carry out this idea, Post bought one outlaying section of Battle Creek, platted it off and began putting up houses. He told his people that philanthropy was not moving him to this and informed them that he was going to make six per cent on his investment. He put up several houses as models but he would build any house that an employee wished and build it the way the workingman wished, after Mr. Post had passed the plans. In this way the wife of the worker could have a linen chute, a



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basement or any improvement about the house that she wished. For this Mr. Post asked that one-tenth of the value of the house be paid down as first installment and the rest in the form of monthly rental until paid for. For instance, if the house was to cost \$2000, the first payment would be \$200, and the rest to come in at \$18 a month or one-hundredth of whatever the rent was. As a result, more of the people employed by the breakfast food king of Battle Creek own their own homes than are owned by the employees of almost any other concern in the United States.

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