



Lady Shirley's SOCIETY PAPERS

Season II: Third Edition, March 2026

EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE,
EXTRAORDINARY STORIES

Dear Gentle Reader,

It is said of March that it comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb. Where this idea comes from, this author is not certain. Some attribute it to the tempestuous nature of weather at its opening and ending with its gentler close, while others point to the astrological shift toward Aries, the ram. Whatever truth, the phrase has followed March since the 18th century and, more often than not, proves quite accurate.

March, my dearests, has never been a timid month. It sweeps into Cloud County with all the boldness of a lion shaking its mane against the lingering chill of winter - chin lifted, mane tousled by the prairie wind, reminding us that winter has not yet surrendered. There is a thrill in Spring's coming, not unlike progress, it so often begins with a gust of courage, a stirring of ambition, and a willingness to step beyond the familiar.

With this bold entrance, we begin with a Jamestown-born pilot who once truly embraced the lion's share of courage.

Yet even as the winds roar, March promises a gentler ending. Seasons that enter with a flourish must eventually

soften, settling into the quiet grace of renewal. And so, this month, we shall wander from tales of a man who chased infamy to a story that rests more tenderly upon the heart - a journey from lion to lamb.

As March quiets its roar, we turn from the sky to the rails - from the lion-hearted to a gentler story. A great railroad tycoon once passed through our early city, and years later his daughter, raised amid the relentless forward motion of locomotives and progress, added a brief visit of her own. Her grace and generosity left their mark. Her journey would lead her home, where she married man by the name of Shepard - a name that invites a softer image and offers a fitting close to this Society Paper. A lamb to a Shepherd; March could hardly offer a sweeter symmetry.

May these reflections warm your days as we await the first true signs of spring. It is this author's hope that, together, we will find inspiration in both the bold beginnings and the peaceful landings that shape our shared history.

*Yours truly,
Lady Shirley*

Our next tale is not local by birth or relocation, but of a stop along the way that came full circle.

In the infant days of our town, the Central Branch of the Union Pacific Railroad carried passengers and freight west. Jason "Jay" Gould owned the line. More than a railroad titan, he was one of the most powerful and controversial figures of the Gilded Age, shaping American finance, transportation, and national politics, with wealth rivaling the Vanderbilts and Rockefellers.

He stopped in Concordia in 1879 to inspect the line. His visit was short but included an impromptu tour through the 8-year-old city with town founder and mayor J.M. Hagaman, Judge Fred W. Sturgess, and Central Branch President, R.M. Pomeroy. The tour lasted only 30 minutes, but the tycoon was optimistic about the future of our town, though he did decline an invitation by Judge Sturgess to build a home here.

Sixteen years later, a far more memorable visit came from his daughter, Helen Miller Gould. Traveling home from vacation in Colorado with her brother and friends, she paused in Concordia to see the line she now owned. Judge Sturgess once again guided a Gould on a town tour, joined by Mayor George W. Marshall and Colonel N.B. Brown. Carriages and horses borrowed from Hugh McConaughey's livery carried the group through the unpaved streets. Three times they passed the courthouse from different directions - first introduced as the courthouse, then the city building, and finally the college building - all in hopes of impressing Miss Gould,

who praised its appearance while noting the similarity of the architecture.

As the ride concluded, Miss Gould halted the carriages. The ladies of the Baptist Church were holding an ice cream social. The group enjoyed their ice cream, cake, and lively conversation. As they left, Miss Gould inquired about the purpose of the funds. She gave the ladies \$20 and her group added \$10 more - a generous sum during the financial panic of 1895. \$30 was the equivalent of several hundred dollars today.

The stop also led to an invitation to attend a play at LaRocque Opera House later that night. Though tired from their travels, they attended, having a wonderful time. The next day, the theatre troupe received a letter from Helen containing a \$10 bill and thanking them for "*a most agreeable evening.*"

Her generosity continued. She was a devoted supporter of libraries, education, religious organizations, and welfare programs. She spoke to the librarian of our 3-year-old library, learning it held only 50 books. Over the years, more than 500 books arrived for the library from her hand.

In 1913, she married Finley Johnson Shepard, an executive of the Missouri Pacific Railway. The grace and generosity she embodied left her remembered as a beloved philanthropist. Little did she know she would one day contribute again to Concordia. Throughout her lifetime she made significant financial contributions to the Children's Aid Society, who, as you know, placed children from New York on Orphan Trains.

LEO THE LUCKY LION

In September of last year, you might recall these Society Papers focused on aviation. Confines of space in these editions is always a challenge, so it is exciting when a new edition expands on topics that have already begun to be explored.

You'll recall that in the 1920's aviation was still so exciting and new. A flight was still a marvel, and opportunities to take to the skies were marked with great fanfare. The country looked in awe at an aircraft, and aircraft manufacturers and pilots were always looking for a new challenge - a record to be broken, or a contest to be had.

This is where our current edition brings us to Martin Jensen. He was born in 1900 on a farm in Jamestown, Ks where he grew up. Upon graduating the 8th grade at age 15, Jensen knew he did not want to follow in his father's farming footsteps. He wanted to be an aviator. He married, taking his honeymoon in an airplane, and left his boyhood home.

In 1927 Charles Lindberg completed his flight across the Atlantic. Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) wanted to capitalize on the buzz with an idea to send "Leo the Lion" on tour. "Leo" was actually named Jackie and was a full-time employee of MGM as their mascot - also appearing in Tarzan movies-weighing over 400lbs. Ryan Aircraft built a special plane to carry the lion, added a safety cage, and modifications for fuel.

In that same year, Jensen entered the Dole pineapple company's famous air race from Oakland, CA to Honolulu, HI. He placed second in that race. While still in Hawaii, he was contracted by MGM to fly

"Leo the Lion" from San Diego to New York. When asked about taking the job, Jensen said *"the pay was good and a contract is a contract."* Using maps, he plotted a course to New York using highways as guides, but MGM had other plans. As this was a publicity stunt, he needed to fly over and circle around large cities such as Phoenix, Albuquerque, and St. Louis on his way to New York.

When the day arrived for Jensen to fly Leo across the US, seeing the modified plane, he quickly realized that Leo would be the star of this show. In an article by Clarence Paulsen, Jensen remarked that when Leo arrived, the lion was not thrilled to be the star of this show and in *"bad humor."* Once inside the plane and Jensen was glad the lions head was in the opposite direction of himself with no room to turn around or the lion *"might have become the copilot, or maybe the sole pilot."* Jensen did have to crawl through a narrow space passing the lion to get to the cockpit. One article stated that the lion licked Jensen's neck along the way!

Takeoff went smoothly, though Jensen's nerves were frazzled. He said that the lion shifted position during takeoff which shifted the plane off balance, but he was able to control it. About 5 hours into the trip, Jensen realized that they were too low to the ground to clear the mountains east of San Diego. He needed to circle the city extra times to gain enough altitude. Things began to settle until he again needed clear the mountains, this time near Phoenix. He was beginning to worry that all the extra circling was using up too much fuel. According to Paulsen's article *"The Flying Lion: Chapter Two"*

"Jensen saw the rim of the 8,000-foot-high Mogollon Mesa rising at least 3,000 feet above his plane's altitude. He circled again, and checked the map he carried. The map show Tonto Creek in good relation to a gap in the heights ahead. It appeared he could fly through that creek's canyon. It turned out that the creek wasn't exactly as the map showed it to be, and soon Jensen had passed the point of no return. The next thing he knew he and his cantankerous and smelly passenger were flying between the walls of a box canyon too narrow for an altitude-gaining circle, or even to turn back. In fact, the plane was actually losing altitude, because the ground below was rising...Jensen later learned that he was then at the place known as Hell's Gate." After a bit more negotiating, he hit some trees at max speed. The trees tore off the plane's emergency night-landing flares, sending off a smoke signal that no one would see. The wings tore away and took out the fuel tanks losing 300 gallons of fuel. The propeller went back into the window in front of Jensen and glass shards hit Leo, but he wasn't seriously injured. Once on the ground, Jensen was able to crawl out unharmed. He left food and water for the lion, wrote a message on some cloth and affixed it to a bush should someone come by, and went to find help.

After miles of walking, navigating steep inclines and unstable rocks, and sleeping that night in the cold, he stumbled across a herd of branded cattle. For a boy not wanting to be a farmer, his childhood knowledge may have saved him. He thought he could attempt to drive the cattle in hopes they'd head home. Realization that these were range cattle and likely didn't have a home hit, and as if that weren't enough, coyotes

were heading his way. He climbed a tree and shot off a pistol to scare them away. The coyotes kept moving and he spent the night in that tree. The next morning, he decided to follow a stream, feet blistering and sore. He spent another night near a tree. On the third day he followed a cow path that led to a cabin he could see in the distance. He yelled and two men came out to help him.

After a night with food, bandages, and sleeping a bed, they drove to the ranger's station. Jensen asked to use the phone, needing to call MGM, but the ranger refused saying that a man was lost and search parties were out looking for him. That man was Jensen. After explaining, he was then allowed to call MGM's people - their first question: *"How's the lion?"*

MGM sparing no expense, instructed Jensen to rescue Leo. They reached out to the biggest rancher in the area, Sam Haught, asking for his help. Sam wasn't sure he wanted to help. A call came in from a "hunter-lawyer" who claimed to have found Leo. He told Jensen that he was *"claiming it under the abandoned-property law"* and *"hinted that he had a gun and that it would be best if Jensen didn't show up at the crash site."* The threat was enough to get Sam to help. Sam organized a party of cowpokes and the next morning they set out to find the lion with Jensen as guide. Upon seeing the party, the hunter-lawyer lost interest in keeping his threat.

Rescuing a 400lb lion was no easy task, but eventually, he was nursed back to health and became the most famous lion in history earning the nickname "Leo the Lucky." Jensen? Well, years later, he was inducted into the Aviation Hall of Fame.