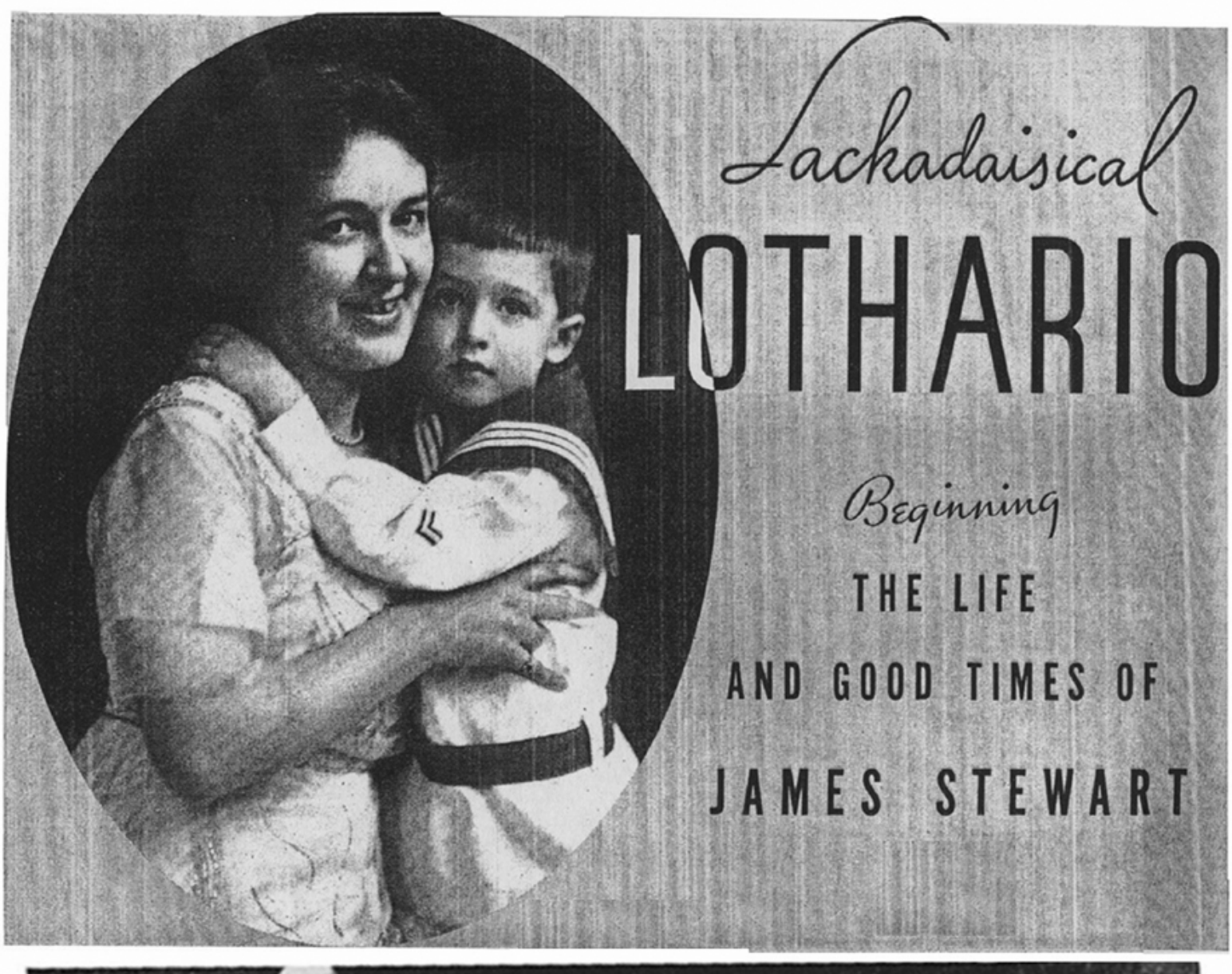
PHOTOPLAY
July, 1939



(Top) A boy's best friend—Jim's mother, with the four-year-old ruler of the Stewart homestead. (Above) Doddie and Ginny, seven-year-old Jim's pet names for his sisters Mary and Virginia

BY WILBUR MORSE, JR.

BOOTH TARKINGTON might have created Jim Stewart. He's *Little Orvie* and *Billie Baxter* grown up, *Penrod* with a Princeton diploma.

The appeal of James Stewart, the shy, inarticulate movie actor, is that he reminds every girl in the audience of the date before the last. He's not a glamorized Gable, a remote Robert Taylor. He's "Jim," the lackadaisical, easy-going boy from just around the corner.

In the same way, the charm of Jim Stewart's life story, as it was unveiled for PHOTOPLAY by his family in the little country town of Indiana, Pennsylvania, by his closest cronies of school and college days and by the men and women who shared the struggles of his first years on Broadway and in Hollywood, is its stunning simplicity.

Jim Stewart is as American as chewing gum, marbles and Sunday-school picnics and the story of his life is a nostalgic saga of Main Street. The Jazz Age was at its height when he went away to prep school, a cynical sophistication was the approved manner when he was in college and later the artificial atmosphere of Broadway and Hollywood made acceptance of a creed of superficiality easy. Yet, through all these distracting influences, Jim Stewart remained essentially unspoiled, the roots of his character ever deep in the soil of substantial values.

And to appreciate fully the wholesomeness which distinguishes Jim Stewart today, it is necessary to trace those roots back to the small town from which he emerged.

Indiana is a brisk, busy little town of about 10,000 population in Western Pennsylvania, in the rolling foothills of the Alleghenies. A county seat and the shopping center of the mining and farming districts which encircle it, Indiana is near enough to Pittsburgh to keep the hayseed combed out of its hair, yet isolated enough from any metropolitan area to achieve an independent personality of its own.

HERE four generations of the Scotch-Irish family of Stewart have enjoyed success and substance as leaders in the business and social life of the town, leaving it only to march off to war, quietly, purposefully; returning without fanfare to the big brown-stoned hardware store of J. M. Stewart and Company which, since 1853, has stood like an impressive guardian at one end of the business block.

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PHOTOPLAY'S AUTHOR INVADES JAMES STEWART'S HOME TOWN AND RETURNS WITH THE MOST REVEALING LIFE HISTORY AND EARLY PHOTOGRAPHS WE HAVE PUBLISHED IN YEARS

It was to this hardware store Jim's grandfather, James Maitland Stewart, returned in Union blue after Grant had lit a cigar and accepted Lee's sword at Appomattox. And it was to this store, his tall, rangy son Alexander Stewart came home to carry on the family tradition, after strolling out of a senior classroom at Princeton to volunteer in the Spanish-American War.

Age: nine years, and—painful memories—not only piano lessons but spectacles!

A family portrait of the Stewarts—taken just before Captain Alec went off to France. Jim, at the age of ten, became man of the house and, to his family's amusement, he hasn't forgotten a certain habit formed then

Jim took the war seriously. He saluted the postman, the grocer, the baker, his teachers

Alec, so the family story goes, clad in white flannels and dancing pumps, had walked out of a chemical laboratory to enlist, leaving behind him some test tubes heating over a fire. The explosion which followed his departure was as devastating as any he heard in Cuba.

They tell a lot of other intriguing tales about this big-boned Alec, who rollicked through Princeton in the gay nineties, such as the time he spirited a cow past campus proctors and into the dean's office in Nassau Hall one night.

But it was a more sedate young Alec Stewart who had buried the pranks of his past in the nailbins of his father's store and was now singing a lusty tenor in the First Presbyterian Church choir, who met and married Elizabeth Jackson from the neighboring town of Apollo. A college graduate, like Alec, Bessie Jackson was the daughter of General S. M. Jackson who had distinguished himself as a Union leader at Gettysburg and was now State Treasurer in Harrisburg.

Bessie Jackson Stewart must have been a remarkably pretty young girl in those days soon after the turn of the century, when she came to Indiana as a bride. She is still strikingly handsome today, her soft white hair worn in a trim bob, her deep blue eyes as young as her smile.

It was from Bessie Stewart, seated in the homey front parlor of her house, with a fat album of precious pictures in her lap, that I

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With sisters Mary and Ginny, Jim was star and producer of a flaming war-time play, fittingly called "The Slacker"

learned the intimate story of Jim's boyhood. Throughout the long afternoon of my visit, Alec was in and out of the room, stopping a moment to add an anecdote, supply a date, laugh over a family joke.

ONE of the first pictures in the book was of an old-fashioned frame house, set back from the street by a terraced yard. This, Mrs. Stewart told me, was their first home after they were married. "The Garden of Eden," Alec had named it, and here all three of their children were born, Jim on May 20, 1908, Mary in 1912 and Virginia in 1914.

Here Jim, when he had passed the crawling stage and had learned to walk, tortured the excitable Polish maid of all work by dragging in worms from the garden to her spotless kitchen, raiding the pantry for peanut butter.

Mrs. Stewart flicked the pages of the album. Here was Jim at four years old, with bangs and a white sailor suit. It was that year, Mrs. Stewart remembered, that Jim fashioned his first airplane, adding wings from a kite to a pushmobile cart and installing the works of a discarded alarm clock as engine.

For two days this contraption served as an exciting new plaything in the back yard and by the third afternoon, Jim was convinced it would fly. Borrowing an idea from the Wright Brothers, Jim decided to test his plane in the air by gliding from the sloping roof of the washhouse.

"He had managed to drag the cart up on the roof," Mrs. Stewart recounted, "and was all ready to take off when Alec happened to come into the yard. His shouts to Jim to stop were too late and he dashed back to the washhouse just in time to catch Jim and the plane as they hurtled toward the ground. They landed in a confused heap under the roof but fortunately no one was hurt.

"I'm sure Jim might have been seriously injured if his father hadn't happened by just when he did, but Jim was merely grieved because his first flight had been interrupted.

" 'It's a very good plane. I know it can fly,' he argued.

"To distract him from any further neck-breaking experiments, Alec suggested that Jim turn his attention to building model planes and, helped by Clyde Woodward, one of the clerks at the hardware store, Jim began on a hobby that has held his interest to this day.

"When he was home last Christmas, he was more enthusiastic in his description of a new model he had just finished building than about anything pertaining to Hollywood."

MRS. STEWART turned the pages of the album again. Next was an entrancing snapshot of Jim gazing up at his father in unmistakable hero worship.

"Jim always has been intensely proud of his father," Mrs. Stewart smiled. "From the time he was a little boy, he's worshiped Alec and the greatest compliment you could give him was to say that he was like his father.

"I remember one of the first times I ever took Jim over to my family's home in Apollo. The Jacksons were a large family and the house was filled with relatives, home for a reunion. Jim was out in the kitchen with Della McGraw, the big, good-natured Irish housekeeper. The fam-

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His first Love was a vain moppet who preferred a rival with a pony. So Jim took buggy rides with neighbors

ily crowded around him cooing compliments, making a great fuss over him.

"'Oh, he has eyes just like his Aunt Emily,' said one.

"'Look, he has his Uncle John's nose.'

"'And his hair, isn't it just like Frank's?'

"Jim stood it as long as he could as one after another of his features was compared to that of some member of the family. Everyone except his father had been mentioned.

"Finally, jealous of the slight, Jim shouted, 'Well, anyway, my teeth are just like Daddy's!'"

"Just like Daddy's." It was the keynote of Jim's childhood, that desire to be like the tall, tender man who never forgot a promise, never failed the nightly ritual of a romp. Jim imitated his father's rangy walk, his wide, jerky gestures, caught the trick of slow, deliberate speech. When you meet Alec Stewart you know instantly where Jim acquired his mannerisms, his voice, his eager interest in all about him.

One of Alec Stewart's happiest hobbies was his membership in the Volunteer Fire Association. Indiana was proud of the tradition of its volunteer fire brigade. To belong to it was a little something like having your name on the rolls of the Union League in larger cities.

Whenever he could, Jim followed his father to the fire association's meetings, watching drills with excited interest, helping polish the nozzle of a hose, sharing the company's pride in the acquisition of each new piece of equipment. Soon Jim's persistence in attending each meeting, his wide-eyed worship of the heroes of the brigade, led to his being accepted as official mascot of the company and when he was six years old, Jim was thrilled at Christmas time by receiving as his main present, a fireman's uniform, complete to visored cap and brass-buttoned tunic, an exact copy of the outfit worn by his father.

The present had no sooner been unwrapped than Jim, disregarding all other gifts, rushed to his room to don the magnificent new raiment. He was still in his prized costume at the Christmas dinner table, having removed the shiny, visored cap only after vigorous protest, when the sonorous bell over the firehouse clanged a summons on the quiet winter afternoon air. Alec pushed his chair away from a half-finished plate of turkey and started out of the house. Before his mother could stop him, Jim, grabbing up his fireman's cap and his hatchet from under the Christmas tree, followed.

"The fire wasn't a very big one," Alec remembers, "just an old barn and we put out the blaze in short order. When I looked around for Jim he wasn't anywhere in sight. I walked around in back of the shed and there he was with his hatchet that wouldn't have made much of a dent on a snowball, hacking away feverishly at a rear door."

It was a memorable experience, that first fire he attended as mascot and, a little later, recounting the story to his grandparents, Jim's enthusiasm began to stretch the facts. The small barn with one or two horses became a great stable with scores of frightened animals trapped in a giant conflagration.

Grandma Stewart listened attentively to the

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