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Sam Rowland notes

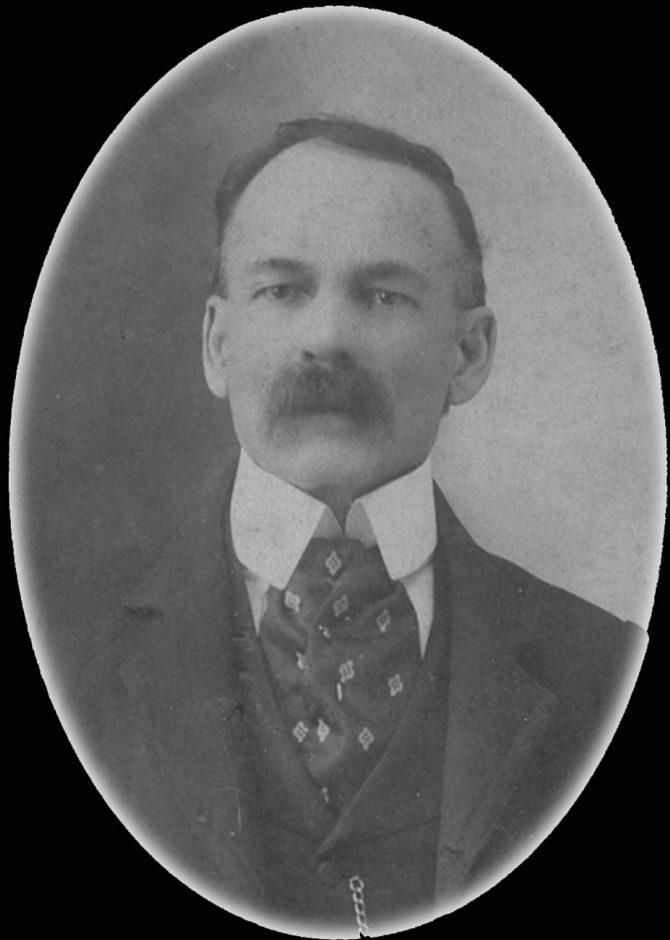
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# THE SLINGERLAND FAMILY



**Samuel & Amalia Slingerland raised a large family on their farm in the small northern Michigan town of Manistee.**

**Slingerland was a conservative Lutheran with a keen business sense. In addition to farming, he supported his family with his real estate dealings.**





**The sons and daughters of Samuel and Amalia Slingerland**

**Back row l to r: Isabelle, Walter Robert, Daisy, Arthur James, Elvina (Vina), John Peter, Lillian.**

**Front row l to r: Lottie, Henry Heanon, Paulina Augusta.**

Son Henry inherited his father's sharp sense for business. He earned spending money as a child by raising honeybees and selling the honey. His first adult business enterprise was reportedly a Great Lakes gambling boat based in Manistee. When the boat was destroyed by fire in about 1905, he moved to Chicago.



**l-r Walter Robert, Henry Heanon, Arthur James II, Arthur James**





The 1909 Chicago City Directory listed Heanon H. Slingerland as a music teacher, with a business address of 105 Ashland Boulevard. (A Mrs. Carrie M. Slingerland was also listed as a music teacher in the 1909 and 1910 directories at the same addresses listed as home addresses for Heanon H. Her relationship to Heanon H. is uncertain. Surviving family members are certain that he married only once, to Nona.) According to Slingerland descendants, Heanon was not a musician himself, but learned enough while working for a family-owned business to give lessons and print sheet music. (He received \$4.00 per student for a month of lessons.) Apparently there came to be several divisions of this business. The operation at 105 Ashland was known as the West Side Conservatory of Music, offering vocal and instrumental instruction.



**Heanon's brother John was listed in the 1910 directory as president of the South Side Academy of Music at 6424 S. Halsted; presumably a similar (probably branch) operation.**

The Chicago Correspondence School of Music had been established in the 1800s, and was a successful business. With the purchase of twelve correspondence ukelele lessons, the customer received a free ukulele.

After the owner died, Heanon H. Slingerland continued to work with the widow, and eventually was able to purchase the business from her. At this point (1914), he changed the name to the Slingerland Correspondence School of Music and moved to 431 S. Wabash.

STUDY MUSIC IN YOUR HOME WITH THE MASTERS. OVER 400,000 SUCCESSFUL PLAYERS OUR PUPILS OUR REFERENCE.



2249 WARD ST CHICAGO  
U.S.A.

Dear Friend:-

We are in receipt of your enrollment for which kindly accept our thanks.

If you will get busy and practice at least an hour a day, you will be surprised how fast you can advance. Do not attempt to play the second lesson until you have thoroughly mastered the first, and you are sure to meet with success.

You may have some friends who want to enroll. I am therefore enclosing herewith, two enrollment blanks. If you get us three pupils, we will give you a nice side-opening, keratol covered case for your instrument. When you receive your outfit, you will wonder how we can give such fine instruments and lessons, however, this advertising plan may not last long.

We have you enrolled under No. \_\_\_\_\_ therefore, in the event you send in any new enrollments, kindly make mention of this number, your name and address, and oblige.

Yours very truly,  
CHICAGO CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL OF MUSIC

S:MT





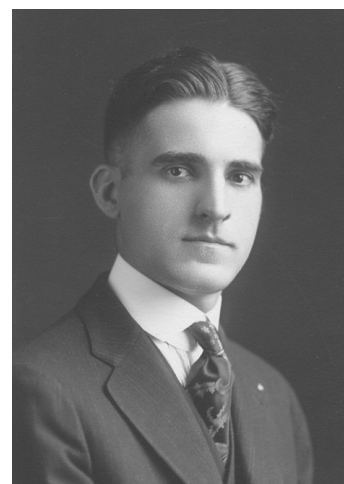
**W.R. Slingerland**

H.H. contacted his younger brother W.R. (Walter Robert) Slingerland who had taken a job with the Armour Company in Detroit after the war, and talked him into coming to Chicago to work with him.

H.H. and W.R. needed a salesman, so they called on their brother Arthur James.

Walter's son Robert also worked in sales for a brief time.

H.H. was considered the money man while W.R. was in production and day-to-day operations. A.J. worked in sales, although W.R. remembered being pressed into service on the sales front early on; at one point they found themselves with a surplus of ukes and he went door-to-door to promote their lesson plan.



**A.J. Slingerland**



In its early days under the ownership of the Slingerland brothers, the Chicago Correspondence School of Music imported string instruments from Germany to sell to students or give away with lesson packages. The Slingerlands were forced into manufacturing when they began to have trouble importing enough instruments to meet demand. They hired a little German guy who started making instruments in his garage. When production demands reached a point that merited in-house manufacturing, the Slingerland brothers rented a building on Diversey near California Avenue. In 1923 the first factory building was purchased by the Slingerlands, at 1815 Orchard Street. Ukuleles were manufactured first, then banjos, and, finally, guitars. Neighboring buildings

were purchased as the business expanded, until the street address became 1815-17-19 Orchard. By the mid-1920s Slingerland boasted over 1700 dealers and laid claim to operating the world's largest and most modern-equipped banjo factory.

By the time of Slingerland's second drum catalog (1929), Slingerland was able to boast that H.H. had been actively interested in the music field for over 29 years and through his personal efforts and supervision had instructed over a million people to play musical instruments. "So without a doubt he has taught more individuals to play than any other living man."

# Marion (Slingerland) McLaughlin

The eldest of H.H. Slingerland's three children, Marion was born in 1919. (H.H. Junior was born in 1921, Dorothy in 1927.) She shared the following memories with the author in 1997.

"There are a lot of details about the family business that I cannot tell you simply because my father seldom spoke about business or financial matters at home. In those days, such affairs were private matters of the man of the house and the women and children were not involved.

My father was a gambler. I don't really know how high the stakes were. I know that when the family would go to the country club, he would retire to the lower level with the other gentlemen, and we often would not see him again until we left. Sometimes he would be very tired, and have me drive the car on the way home. In one such game he won a yacht, which was moored in Miami. My father knew that he could sell a new Ford automobile in Miami for much more than he could buy it for right here in Chicago. He bought one and loaded the whole family up for the long drive to Florida. I distinctly remember leaving the next day after classes got out for the summer at the end of my junior year of high school in 1935. The car was sold in Miami for a profit, and my father hired a captain to sail the boat, with the whole family aboard, up the East Coast, down the St. Lawrence seaway, into the Great Lakes, and right home to Chicago. The trip took six weeks.

The boat was named "Annabell" and was moored at the Chicago Yacht Club. Nearly every Sunday we would pack up a picnic and go out on Lake Michigan. Bud and I were both quite athletic, and pretty strong swimmers. I was a certified lifeguard. We would go way out on the lake, until we could no longer see land, then let the boat drift. Bud would dive off the boat; I'd climb up on the mast and dive from there. On one particular Sunday when Bud and I were swimming a good three hundred yards from the boat, a storm came up. I'd never seen a storm appear so fast. It came out of nowhere! The sky got dark, the wind blew, and the waves got so high that the boat was getting tossed about. I actually saw the propeller and rudder above the water as I swam toward the boat. I made it to the boat, and my father helped me climb aboard. I no more than stood up when my father told me to go get my brother. I did not question my father when he told me to do something. I immediately dove back in and went back for Bud, who was still the better part of

It seemed to take forever to get to him, and even longer to get back to the boat again. My father helped us into the boat, then put his hand on my shoulder. He looked at me and told me Bud would never have made it if I hadn't gone back for him.

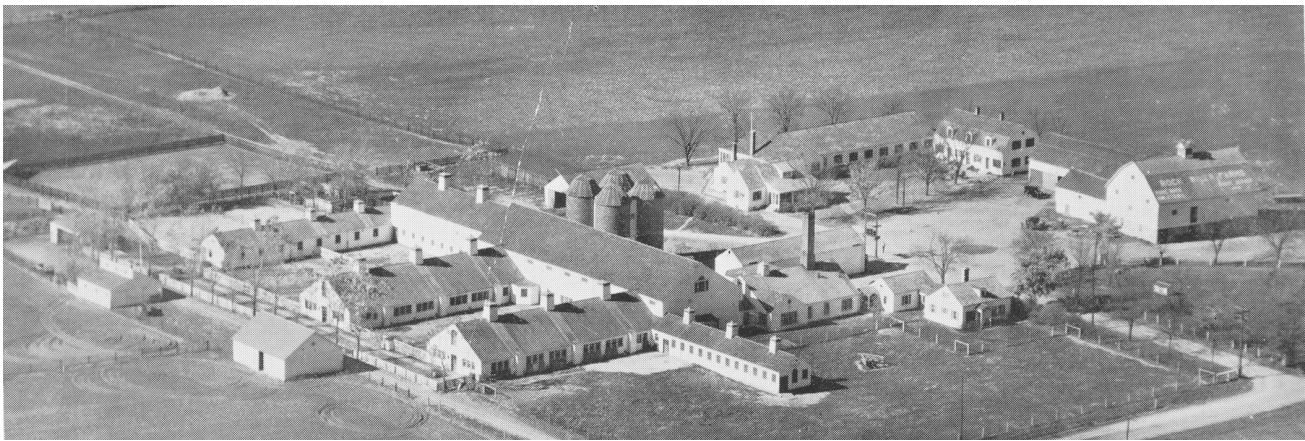
My father put an ad in the next Sunday's paper, and sold the boat. I asked him why, and he said he wanted nothing more to do with it because he nearly lost two of his children that day.

Bud and I were very athletic; tennis and swimming were two of our passions. I didn't go out a lot, preferring to spend a lot of time on the tennis courts. I went to Oak Park High School and I'd see a lot of my classmates when I'd go along with my father to the big clubs like the Panther Room. He had a huge car, with the extra passenger seat behind the front seat, facing the rear. He often delivered drums when we went to a club—he took out that extra seat so he could fit a set of drums in the back.

I have many happy memories of my childhood growing up in the Chicago suburb of River Forest; riding bikes, playing tennis, picking grapes from Concordia's grapevines. [author note: Concordia University of River Forest is my Alma Mater.] Many of the residents of River Forest were stockbrokers, and when the crash came quite a few of them committed suicide in their garages. They'd close the garage door, open the card windows, start the car, and wait. There were a *lot* of those. We would be riding our bikes and stop to watch them carry the corpse from the garage to the ambulance. Every night my father would ask us how many we saw that day. I remember him banging his fist on the table and practically shouting "Cowards! They're all cowards! *I'll* make it!!" And he did!"

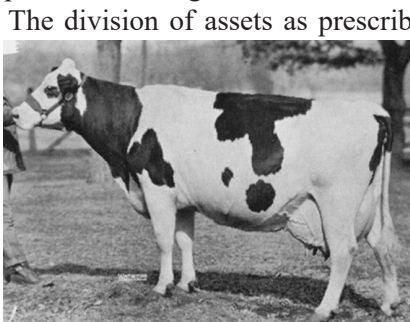
For years it was in the back of H.H. Slingerland's mind that he would return, in retirement, to farm life. An ad in the Chicago Tribune for farm land caught his attention, and in 1940 he bought the Rock River Farms (near Rockford, Illinois) from Mrs. Ruth Hanna McCormick. Mrs. McCormick was the widow of former U.S. Senator Medill McCormick. At the time (and for the preceding two decades) the farms were home to one of the nation's leading Holstein herds. The farm was just what Henry Heanon had been dreaming of. He planned to build his retirement home on one of the farm's ridges that overlooked the Rock River valley. Because of the labor shortage caused by World War II, H.H. maintained a Hereford beef herd. As soon





**Slingerland Rock River Farms**

as the labor pool grew again, he began a dairy herd with commercial Holstein cows. In 1944 he ventured into registered Holsteins with the purchase of a “top young sire of promise”, King Bessie Supreme. Over the next two years he purchased many additional registered cows until the three milking barns were filled. Just as the herd was beginning to gain the respect of industry experts, H.H. Slingerland died, in 1946.



**Gewina the super-cow**

The division of assets as prescribed in H.H. Slingerland’s will took the family somewhat by surprise. He left the drum business to son H.H. Junior (“Bud”), some commercial

real estate to daughter Dorothy, and the farm to daughter Marion. At the time, some family members were upset, feeling that Marion had received more than her share.

According to Marion, the reason she inherited the farm was because her father did not want his dream to die with him. He knew that she was responsible enough (and animal lover enough) to continue with his vision.

Marion (Slingerland) McLaughlin (who passed away in 2002), her husband Richard (who died in 1985) and their daughter Nancy (who dies in 2003) did much more than just “keep the farm going.” It became a world-class operation. They acquired herds and worked with herd and breeding consultants to develop an internationally known breeding program known as the Rock River Holsteins. The USDA in one bulletin depicted Rock River Holstein “Haven Hill Crescent Gwina Count” as the exemplary cow of the Holstein-Friesian breed. This particular cow broke numerous mile and fat production records, and is still a source of great pride

for the farm. Carnation Farms, when their loss of a production record appeared imminent, insisted that the cow be monitored around the clock in order to properly document the record. The breeder’s association sent a man who purchased a rocking chair and sat with the cow around the clock to document the record. Marion related another story about this cow in which an expert from the University of Illinois was sent to examine the cow when it was pregnant. He proclaimed that if she did in fact give birth that the calf would be stillborn. A healthy calf was delivered, and the cow continued to set records. The remarkable cow is buried on the farm, in a grave marked with a huge marble marker.

A disastrous fire destroyed the barn complex in 1969, after which the herd was dispersed. When they rebuilt, the McLaughlins entered the Angus business and have once again carefully bred a prize herd.

At this writing, the family farm is still going strong, and still owned by the relatives of H.H. Slingerland.



**Marion (Slingerland) McLaughlin  
at Gewina’s grave in 1997**



Production records did not survive, so it is not known exactly how many stringed instruments Slingerland was turning out in its heyday of the early '20s. Some insight can be gained, however, by looking at the numbers of Slingerland's competitors of the day. Martin was making only about 1,000 instruments per year. Gibson averaged around 10,000 instruments per year. The real giant of the era was Lyon and Healy, also of Chicago. Lyon and Healy's 1897 catalog claimed annual production of over 100,000 units (stringed instruments with the Washburn brand name). This number shrank as the '20s approached and sharply declined in the late '20s. It has been suggested that some of Slingerland's guitars were made (at least in part) by Regal and/or Harmony. (See the resource page, 244.)

