1

It might have been a long, hot, boring summer for the three members of the Sugar Creek Gang that were left—and there were *only* three of us left, Poetry, Dragonfly, and me —if all of a sudden one of the most interesting, exciting, and dangerous experiences hadn't exploded like a Fourth of July firecracker right in front of our eyes.

That stormy, mysterious, dangerous, and upside-down experience came to life the first week after Big Jim, Circus, and Little Jim left Sugar Creek territory to be gone for two whole weeks. Big Jim and Circus were to work on Big Jim's uncle's farm in Tippecanoe County, and Little Jim would visit a cousin in Wisconsin.

The mystery started the week the new Bay Tree Inn Motor Court was finished and had what is called "open house." Our family as well as maybe everybody else's family in the neighborhood went to see it. Well, not *all* our family went—just Mom and Dad and me—because Charlotte Ann, my chubby little cute-nosed sister, had been left to be baby-sat at Dragonfly's house.

There wasn't anything Charlotte Ann would rather do, anyway, than be baby-sat by Dragonfly's mother, who nearly always gave her a new

toy. She also let her play house with a set of pink plastic dishes and do almost anything in the world she wanted to do that wasn't dangerous.

I never will forget what my mother said to my father when the three of us were alone in Unit 17 at the Bay Tree Inn. That neat little cottage had been named Cliff Cottage and had been built by the management for people who wanted to stay quite a ways away from the sounds and sights of tourists in the sixteen other units. It sort of hung on the rim of a sandstone cliff overlooking a deep ravine, the same ravine, in fact, through which flows the small stream the gang calls "the branch."

Except for Sugar Creek itself, we liked the branch better than any other stream in the county. You could follow its sometimes lazy, sometimes nervous and excited and noisy, way from its source all the way through Harm Groenwold's woods and pasture, then into and through Thompsons' woods to where it finally empties at the mouth of the branch, where most of the time the gang keeps its boat tied.

Poetry, who is always reading interesting things and thinking up different ideas to make people laugh, has said maybe a hundred times, "The branch can lie in bed all day and run all over the county at the same time."

And Dragonfly, who also has a keen mind, nearly always answers him with: "It doesn't just *lie* in bed, it *runs* in bed—and not just all day but all night and, like a certain friend of mine, it's also all wet."

Anyway, standing near the picture window of Cliff Cottage's air-conditioned living room, Mom looked out and across the footbridge that spanned the ravine and said, "You couldn't find anything more picturesque at Turkey Run State Park, or at The Shades, or even in Brown County."

Brown County was the beautiful hill country Mom had been born and brought up in and where she had been a schoolteacher and a secretary before Dad had found her and married her to make her a farmer's wife.

Dad was standing beside Mom with his left arm halfway around her. Looking out that same window, he remarked, "If anybody taking a walk out there on the overhanging porch, or across the footbridge, should accidentally lose his balance and topple over, he would land like a ton of bricks on the rocks below and break a lot of bones. It's a good thing they have that iron railing all the way across."

Mom's answer was: "Not a ton but only one hundred forty-seven pounds. And not of bricks but of a hot, tired, and worn-out housewife who would like to spend a few days' vacation here away from washing, ironing, cooking, looking after the chickens, answering the telephone, canning cherries, raspberries, corn, and beans, and keeping her patience with two noisy children."

I was standing behind my parents near the fireplace at the time. I had just come in to ask an important question that Poetry Thompson,

my almost best friend, who was just outside the door, wanted me to ask. It was a *very* important question—one of the most important questions I might ever ask.

Hearing Mom say she needed a vacation from her two noisy children, I accidentally on purpose cleared my throat.

She turned a startled face in my direction, grinned, and remarked, "My first and worst son excepted, of course."

Being called their "first and worst" son by my parents was their way of saying I was the only son they had and that they liked me. So I grinned back at my first and worst mother and answered, "Your first and *best* son agrees with you. You do deserve a vacation, and I know a way I can help raise money to help your first and worst *husband* pay for it."

That seemed a good way to get to do what my mind was all excited about getting permission to do—in fact, what Poetry and I already had our minds made up to do. And all that was needed was to get our parents to agree to it.

When for a minute neither my mother nor my father answered me, I managed to say, "Of course, if you wouldn't *want* the money, I could save it for a very badly needed two-week vacation for myself, just as soon as Big Jim and Circus and Little Jim get back. In fact, you could take *your* vacation right here in Cliff Cottage while the gang is having a north woods camping trip, which we haven't had for quite a few summers—if I can remember that far back."

Dad answered my suggestion by reminding me that six boys he knew had had a *winter* vacation not so long ago. "You *do* remember when the gang flew to Palm Tree Island, don't you?"

For a few seconds I let myself remember the gang's wonderful trip to the West Indies. First, our plane had sailed high out over small islands called the Florida Keys. As we'd looked down at them, Poetry had said that they looked like the "disjointed vertebrae of the backbone of the skeleton of a giant, hundred-mile-long dinosaur."

Then, after only a hundred or more or less minutes in the plane, we had landed at the Palacia airport. Palacia was the capital of Palm Tree Island. There we were welcomed by a missionary friend of Old Man Paddler's and by hundreds of excited, friendly, Spanish-speaking people.

It was while we were on that vacation on Palm Tree Island that we found Seneth Paddler's long-lost twin brother, Kenneth.

For another few seconds, while I was still standing by the fireplace in the Cliff Cottage living room, my mind's eye saw Kenneth Paddler, long-bearded and looking exactly like his brother, riding down one of Palacia's cobblestone streets in a small cart. He was driving a billy goat, an honest-to-goodness billy goat.

My father's voice broke into my memories of the gang's West Indies vacation as he leveled his gray green eyes at me. "Was there something special you wanted to say about how you

could earn a little extra money this summer to help make it possible for your hardworking father, who *never* gets a vacation, to go *with* your mother when she goes on *her* vacation?"

What on earth! I thought. Imagine a boy's *father* needing a vacation. "You mean you get tired of planting and plowing corn, feeding hogs, making speeches at Farm Bureau meetings, milking cows, and building fences? Or are you just tired of having to put up with a son you wouldn't *have* to put up with if you would send him off to camp somewhere—maybe in the north woods?"

"Good try." Dad grinned and added, "But I believe you were talking about your first and worst *parents'* vacation."

I came out then with what was on my mind, beginning with, "Do you like fried frogs legs?"

Mom whirled around from the picturesque view across the gully, looked at me with an exclamation point in her brown eyes, and asked, "What kind of question is that?"

Maybe I should have told you—for about a week at our house we had been having a lot of family fun pretending we were actors in a play, having listened to what is called a "mock trial" the week before at the Sugar Creek Literary Society.

Sometimes I was a lawyer and Mom was the jury. My smallish sister, Charlotte Ann, was being tried for such crimes as spilling her milk, pulling up a petunia instead of a weed, or leaving the screen door open and letting our old black-and-white cat in. Things like that. Nearly

always my father was the judge, and he would do what is called "pronounce sentence."

So when my brown-eyed mother asked me there in the Cliff Cottage, "What kind of question is that?" I could feel my father's gray green eyes boring into me from under his reddish brown brows, asking the same question.

"If it please the court," I began, "I am not the criminal in this case. I am the defense attorney, and my client is an honest boy."

For a minute I actually felt I *was* a lawyer, as Poetry's father had been in the mock trial. I swaggered over to the picture window that overlooked the limestone cliff on the other side and said, "See that little thread of water away down there at the bottom of the gully? That friendly little stream laughs and dances like an innocent barefoot boy through Harm Groenwold's woods and on through his pasture, through Thompsons' woods, and finally empties into Sugar Creek at the place known as the mouth of the branch, sacrificing its happy, carefree life to the larger, well-known creek shown on the map as Sugar Creek. Now, Your Honor, it so happens that the boys of the Sugar Creek Gang keep their boat tied there—"

In my mind I was back at the mock trial. It felt good being able to think on my feet, better than it does sometimes when I am alone in the woods yelling out Lincoln's Gettysburg Address to the trees and birds and frogs. I swung around then to my parents, who in my mind had just become the jury, and went on.

"Last night, while Leslie Thompson and his friend, William Jasper Collins, son of the famous Farm Bureau speaker, Theodore Collins, were sitting in their boat fishing for catfish, they noticed that over on the island among the willows and pickerel weeds maybe a hundred bullfrogs were having a Farm Bureau meeting, bellowing and croaking and having the time of their lives.

"In the frogs' meeting, one big shaggy-browed father frog stood up and bellowed: 'Fellow members of this convention, the Bay Tree Inn Dining Room has listed on its menu at a charge of ten dollars per dinner, chicken-fried Sugar Creek frogs legs. I have just learned that two of the boys of the Sugar Creek Gang have read that menu and have decided to go into business as the Sugar Creek Frogs Legs Supply Company. The Bay Tree Inn management has offered them fifty cents for every pair of frogs legs they bring in—a paltry sum, for legs as large as ours.'"

I stopped in my speech—it was a little hard to be my father and a bullfrog at the same time. But it did feel good to have my parents listening without interrupting, so I quickly went on, hurrying a little to get in what was on the frog speaker's mind. "'One of the boys of the gang, the first and worst son of Theodore Collins, wants to earn enough money to pay for his parents' vacation, and it is up to the citizens of Frogs Legs Island to stop him. If the boys *do* organize their company, they'll row their boat

over here every night, shine their flashlights all around, blinding us, and fill their gunnysacks with us, and we'll all be chicken fried.'

"The big, handsome bullfrog father finished his speech, let out a scared croak, and sank like a submarine into the shallow water. The maybe one hundred other frogs at the convention went *ker-plunk* under at the same time, because maybe Leslie Thompson or William Jasper Collins had thrown a rock over toward the island and scared them all half to death."

Right away I turned myself into the judge. I swung back from the picture window I had been looking out of and asked, "Lady and gentleman of the jury, have you reached a verdict?"

The gentleman of the jury, who was also the foreman, answered, "We have, Your Honor. We find the defendant guilty!"

Quicker than a frog's croak, my father became the judge, sentencing me with lowered eyebrows and stern words. "You, first and worst son, are hereby sentenced to membership on the governing board of the Sugar Creek Frogs Legs Supply Company. When do you begin operations?"

From behind me, a boy's voice broke in to say, "Tonight, sir." It was the friendly, ducklike voice of Leslie Poetry Thompson, who had come in while the frog was making his speech and who maybe had been listening to the whole thing.

Mom broke up the meeting then, saying,

"We'd better hurry on home. The mail will be there in—" she interrupted herself to look at her wristwatch, then finished her sentence "—in another thirty minutes."

"What's the rush?" the judge and gentleman of the jury asked. "I thought maybe you'd like to run on into town and shop around for that vacation lounging robe you've been looking in the catalogs for."

The lady of the jury gave the gentleman of the jury a smallish frown and said, "Oh, you!"

Then Mom added, "I'm sorry, but I won't be able to take any vacation this year. Not while my boss is on his own vacation."

"Your *boss?* Is that what I am to you?" Dad asked.

It seemed a good time for Poetry and me to go outside and discuss plans for our first trip to Frogs Legs Island that very night.

I knew what Mom meant about her "boss" being on vacation. Old Man Paddler had finished the last chapter of the book he had been writing, and my mother was typing it for him. The old man wasn't on a vacation exactly. He was in California visiting his nephew, who was on *his* vacation and wanted his uncle to come out and go fishing with him in the Pacific Ocean for codfish off the coast of Santa Cruz and for mackerel off the barge near Santa Ana.

Mom had been working every day during her spare time to get the book finished before the old man would get back. He had been gone for more than a week.

Being secretary for Old Man Paddler meant also that she had to look after his mail, which our mail carrier, Joe Sanders, left in Theodore Collins's box every day instead of in the old man's box up in the hills.

Nearly every day there had been a letter, and sometimes quite a few, from people who had read the old man's first book, *The Possible Man in the Impossible Boy,* and wanted him to explain something or other. And sometimes there would be a letter from somebody with a heavy heart who wanted him to pray for him or her.

Nearly every day, also, there would be a letter from missionaries, thanking him for praying for them and for helping pay their missionary expenses.

Being a private secretary, Mom was supposed to open all the mail to see if there was anything important enough to have to be forwarded to California.

One thing, especially, Mom was supposed to watch for—any news from Palm Tree Island about Kenneth Paddler. Soon after the Sugar Creek Gang found him, he had disappeared again, and the missionaries didn't know where he was. He had written one letter to his brother, Seneth, saying he hoped to come back to Sugar Creek as soon as he felt able to. But then, just as many years before when he had had amnesia, he'd just disappeared.

Anyway, while Mom and Dad were still talking inside the Cliff Cottage living room, Poetry

and I took a walk across the narrow footbridge toward the other side of the ravine. We stopped about halfway across to look down at the very happy little branch, threading its way around among the rocks.

"Your big bullfrog father was right," Poetry remarked, leaning over the railing and focusing his eyes on the rocks the saucy little stream was tumbling around and over and through. "Anybody falling over the edge would *really* get hurt and—"

He stopped himself, exclaiming, "Listen!"

I didn't have to listen to hear what I was hearing, which was the sound of a motor way back in the woods somewhere. It sounded a little like an electric saw cutting down a tree or cutting a tree into fireplace wood.

We looked out into the dense woods and saw two motorcycles driving like crazy toward us along the path that bordered the branch. At the farther end of the bridge we were in the middle of, the riders slowed down, skidded to a stop, and looked across to where we were. It seemed that they weren't seeing us, though, but were looking past us to the large living room window of Cliff Cottage where Mom and Dad maybe still were.

They stopped only a few minutes, talking to each other, then both motors roared to life and took off back into the dense woods and up a steep hill. They dodged this way and that to miss trees and bushes and fallen logs, going in the direction of Harm Groenwold's apple

orchard, which we knew was on the other side. Then they disappeared.

"Did you see what I saw?" Poetry asked.

What we had both seen was a name in large letters printed on the back of each of their red leather jackets. It was SONS OF LUCIFER.

"Maybe that is the name of their motorcycle club," Poetry guessed.

But those two motorcycles racing through the woods didn't seem very important right that minute while Poetry and I were planning our first big business venture.

How was I to know that that very night, while we would be on Frogs Legs Island, the Sons of Lucifer would explode us into a very dangerous adventure?

2

By the time my parents came out of Cliff Cottage to drive us home, Poetry and I had built up our hopes so high that we had saved almost a hundred dollars from the two hundred pairs of frogs legs we were going to harvest and sell to the manager of the Bay Tree Inn Dining Room. That would be fifty dollars apiece. We could have a lot of fun doing it, too, having had quite a lot of experience catching bullfrogs at night when all the gang was there. But, of course, this time there would be only the two of us.

So we planned, but we got our plans upset when we stopped at Dragonfly's house to pick up Charlotte Ann. The minute we pulled up to the mailbox under the silver maple tree at their place, Dragonfly came running like the wind toward us. He was carrying a copy of *The Sugar Creek Times.*

"Look!" he exclaimed. Then his face took on a mussed-up expression. He let out a sneeze and explained with a grin, "I might be allergic to the ink on this paper."

Right away his thoughts came back to where they had been, and he thrust the paper toward us, showing us a page he had marked with red pencil. It was an advertisement by the

Bay Tree Inn Dining Room and—of all things! —it included the *menu* Poetry and I had already seen, which had given us the idea of making a hundred dollars selling frogs legs that summer.

I hadn't seen Dragonfly so excited in a long time. "L–l–last night when we came home from visiting Uncle Quentin at Colfax, we stopped on the bridge so Mother could watch the lightning bugs above the island. Th–th–th–there was m–m–m–maybe a million bullfrogs whooping it up all up and down the creek. I'll bet we could sell all we could catch!"

Dragonfly's mother, with Charlotte Ann toddling along beside her, came out the Gilberts' front door then. My small sister was carrying a new blonde-haired doll in the crook of her arm. "Come on in a minute," Mrs. Gilbert called to my mother. "See what came in the mail this morning!"

And while the judge of the court and Old Man Paddler's secretary went into the Gilberts' house to see a new fur-collared coat Dragonfly's mother had ordered from a catalog, the only three members of the Sugar Creek Gang that were left organized the Thompson, Gilbert, and Collins Frogs Legs Supply Company.

Standing in the shade of the silver maple beside their mailbox, we made a three-cornered circle and agreed to divide our profits equally and to stand by each other "through thick and thin, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, until death do us part."

It was Dragonfly's idea to use part of a wedding ceremony for what he called our "Pledge of Allegiance." Even though it wasn't anything new, it would have to do until we could think up something especially good for a frogs legs supply company.

Pretty soon the jury came back out, having decided Mrs. Gilbert's new fur-collared coat was not guilty of having anything wrong with it. Old Man Paddler's secretary, being a human being, came mincing across the yard toward Thompson, Gilbert, and Collins, wearing the new coat, as if she was a model in a women's style show.

And just then Dragonfly sneezed. He said to Poetry and me, "Mother might have to send it back. I might be allergic to the stimulated mink collar." And he sneezed again.

Poetry whispered to him, "The word is *simulated,* not *stimulated.*"

Dragonfly got a stubborn expression on his face and answered Poetry, "The word is *stimulated.* Dad says it's *stimulated* mink."

Seeing the Gilberts' mailbox, Mom decided we'd better hurry on home to get our own mail, so pretty soon we were spinning down the gravel road toward our place.

The minute we were in the driveway and had stopped, Mom was out of the car and taking a quick look in the box that said "Theodore Collins" on it.

It was empty.

"How come!" she complained to her hus-

band. "The Gilberts already had *their* mail. It shouldn't take this long for Joe to get from there to here!"

"Don't you remember?" Dad reminded her. "They've changed the route a little. He drives down the lane between our south pasture and Groenwolds, delivers Harm's mail, circles back past the schoolhouse and Rogerses, then Thompsons, and finally stops here. We're one of the last stops on the route now."

Dad himself took a peek into the empty box, scratched his head, and remarked, "He should have been here by now, though."

We got special permission from the judge and his wife to make a fast trip down to the boat at the mouth of the branch. We wanted to make sure it was empty of water and that the oars were in their hiding place nearby, so that, as soon as it was dark enough, we could make our first trip to Frogs Legs Island, which the frog speechmaker had named the place.

Poetry and I swung onto our bikes and away we went *rickety-whirlety-sizzle* down the gravel road, stirring up a cloud of dust that sailed toward the woods in the direction of the leaning linden tree and the spring.

At the north road, we stopped in the shade of the big sugar tree, as we nearly always did to see if there were any new sale bills tacked on it, which there would be if anybody in the county was having a farm sale.

I was ready to take off, being in a hurry to get to the boat, when Poetry stopped me.

"Wait—I want to show you something!"

He stood his bike against the trunk of the big tree and waddled over to the rail fence, ordering me to follow him, which I did. A few feet from the fence, he slowed down and, shushing me, crept slowly toward what looked like a big new spiderweb. "Watch!" he ordered, and I watched impatiently as he stooped, picked up a firefly he found half buried in the grass, and threw it into the spider's web.

Quicker than the firefly could have given a fleeting flash, a big brown spider came driving out of his hiding place straight for the firefly. He seized it and—well, I turned away, always feeling sorry for anything that got caught in a spiderweb.

Maybe it was because Circus, one of the members of our gang, had almost lost his father once when he had been bitten by a black widow spider.

"Let's go," I said to Poetry.

He answered, "Yeah, let's! I could at least have fed the spider a centipede. I'm sorry!" Which proved my almost best friend *did* have a tender heart, and that is one reason he is my almost best friend.

In only a few minutes, our bikes reached the hill that leads down to the branch bridge, and there, not more than fifty feet from where the row of lilacs starts, was the red-white-and-blue mail truck and Joe Sanders sitting beside it in the shade of an elm tree.

"Flat tire," Joe said to us when we braked to

a stop. "I had one flat this morning when I was still in town. I left it for repair at the station, and now I've got another. Maybe on a day when I've planned a fishing trip right after dinner, I ought be *double* sure I have a spare with me."

"I used your phone," he said to Poetry, "and the station is sending a man out as soon as they can. But it's going to make delivery late for the rest of the people on this route."

"You have any mail for the Collinses and Old Man Paddler?" I asked.

Joe looked at his watch, then up the road to see if maybe his spare tire was coming. He said, "Not much for the Collinses but several letters and a package for Mr. Paddler. Oh, yes, there was a card for you—two, in fact."

He handed me two postcards, one from Seneth Paddler in California and addressed to William J. Collins, Secretary, The Sugar Creek Gang. The other was from Circus and Big Jim down in Tippecanoe County.

We read the card from Old Man Paddler first. It was written in his very careful, trembling longhand and said:

> I am going to be away a little longer than I planned, so you boys can run up to the cabin Saturday to see how things are. The lawn will need mowing again. Yesterday I caught seventeen mackerel while fishing from the barge just off the coast from Santa Ana. Next winter, maybe, I'll fly you boys out for a few days just to see what salt-

water fishing is like—and you can take in Disneyland while you're here.

My heart leaped with a glad feeling—even greater, it seemed, than when we had first found out we were going to get to vacation on Palm Tree Island.

"Good news?" Joe Sanders asked, but I was already reading the card from Circus and Big Jim, part of which was:

> We might not get to stay the full two weeks. There's a new law, we found out, that won't let a farmer hire a boy under sixteen to work for him, even if it is his own uncle. And if the boy *does* work, he can't get paid for it. So look for us home one of these days or nights.

The upper half of the card was in Big Jim's handwriting, and the lower half was from Circus, who wrote in green ink:

> We've been having a lot of fun with Big Jim's new tape recorder. Yesterday I sneaked up on a ruffed grouse while he was making his drumming noise. It sounded like a rubber ball bouncing a mile a minute on a tin roof. When we get back, we can tape our voices and all the different sounds in the swamp and along the creek.

Poetry asked Joe Sanders then, "Was there any mail for Leslie Thompson?"

"There was," Joe said. "I handed it to your mother when I made the call for the spare tire. It was your science magazine. It has an article on fireflies. Science has discovered what it is that makes them light up and—" Joe Sanders stopped, grinned, and explained, "I had a few minutes to spare, so I leafed through it—*after* I delivered it to your mother, of course."

Everybody on Route 4 liked Joe Sanders so much that we might not even care if he opened our *first-class* mail—which, of course, he wouldn't, because it would be against the law.

One of the letters for Old Man Paddler, as well as the package, was from an address on Palm Tree Island, I noticed. Would the letter—and maybe even the box—be from the old man's twin brother?

When I saw the foreign postmark, the idea hit me that if Joe would let me, I could take them home in a hurry just as soon as Poetry and I could make a flying run to the creek to see if the boat and the oars were there. That way Mom wouldn't have to wait for him to get his tire fixed.

It *seemed* like a good idea, but it wasn't.

"Sorry," Joe said, "but there's a law that won't let me give mail for somebody else to anyone under eighteen years of age. Are you eighteen or more?" he finished with a chuckle.

I wasn't and hadn't been for a long time.

"But I'm going right straight home," I objected, not liking to have my idea squelched.

Joe looked at Poetry and me and, in a serious voice, said, "These are days when too many people are keeping only the laws they happen to like. But laws, boys, are for obeying. Suppose, for instance, that I let you have your parents' mail and Mr. Paddler's. And suppose there was something of great importance in the letter and maybe in the box—something worth thousands of dollars. Just supposing, of course. And if for any reason you should lose it, you wouldn't like to visit me in jail, would you?"

Poetry cut into the conversation then and was smart enough to say, "We couldn't look through the bars at a nicer mail carrier."

Joe's face had a grin on it when he said, "I'd agree with you. Even my wife says so."

There was the sound now of a car coming from the direction of the Collins place, and it looked like a service truck. At the same time, from up the hill at Poetry's house, the dinner bell rang.

"That bell," Poetry announced, "means I have only thirty minutes to get ready to eat ham and eggs, apple pie, and maybe ice cream. Come on!" he ordered me. "Let's go see if the boat's OK for the grand opening of the Thompson, Gilbert, and Collins Company."

Leaving Joe and the mail truck with the maybe important mail in it, away we went, in a hurry to get to the creek where the boat was, so that Poetry wouldn't be too late to eat the

lunch that would help him grow even bigger than he was.

The lilacs were in full bloom, my eyes and nose told me as I took off after my almost best friend for the mouth of the branch. Remembering how much Old Man Paddler's secretary liked lilacs, I decided to pick maybe five, and take them home when I went. I would stop at our toolshed, get an empty flower vase, fill it with fresh water from the iron pitcher pump, put the lilac stems in it, and carry them in to where Mom would be typing the old man's book—if she wasn't busy in the kitchen getting lunch. I would say, "Sweet fragrance to the sweetest member of the jury for—"

My sweet thoughts were interrupted by Poetry's yell from the creek. "Our boat's gone!"

Hearing him yell out like that with mad worry in his voice set my own worry on fire. I took off on the run to where he was. Breaking out into the open space by the maple sapling, I looked at the place where the boat was supposed to be. And Poetry was right—the floating stock of the Thompson, Gilbert, and Collins Frogs Legs Supply Company was gone!