Kelly’s “Rock Of Gibraltar”

BARBARA BARTH

“Kelly, Kentucky! Stop here three
minutes. Next stop Hopkinsville.” A town
like a million others. Hay, feed and grain
shed and a dinky little station. A small
boy, whose pants were patched with flesh,
and a dog mooching on the platform.
Everyone on the day coach gives Kelly one
look and one sigh and pulls in his neck.
Just another three-minute stop.

I stepped off the train and eyed criti-
cally the town in which I was to spend
two months of my summer vacation. There
was not much to see but there was a feel-
ing of friendliness and contentment every-
where. It was as if I had stepped into an
entirely different world. After a few
weeks I began to understand that feeling.
It was an opportunity to be your own
man, the opportunity to live without being
merely a figure on a graph, a street
address, a customer to whom articles are
delivered.

Bert Hale symbolized this feeling.
Sooner or later everyone came to “Bertram
B. Hale’s General Store and Post Office.”
It was the meeting place of everyone in
Kelly. The store is a typical small town
store in which everything can be bought,
from penny candy to fencing wire and
shoes. Bert also houses and operates the
Post Office which occupies one corner of
the store. The entire store is warmed by
a heating stove which stands in the middle
of the room. It is around this stove, winter
and summer, that the town of Kelly
gathers. Reverend Amos Jensen remark-
ed once that Bert had more of a congrega-
tion around his stove than the Reverend
had around his pulpit.

Besides running the store and Post
Office seven days a week, Bert is the
deputy Fire Marshal and chairman of the
Town Board. He is a gentle man, with the
face of a ripe apple that has been left too
long on the tree. A few wrinkles, yes, but
still sound to the core and slightly rosy
on the surface. He is tall and broad-
shouldered. I would judge his age to be
about sixty-five. He takes great interest
and pride in his town and in the people
who live there. He possesses the remark-
able talent of remembering everyone’s
name and personal history.

Bert has a good reputation, both for
the quality of his merchandise and for the
quality of his life. He has a conscience as
clear as good flying weather. During the
war, Bert launched a one-man Bond
Drive. He sold nearly two thousand dol-
lars worth of bonds. He likes to read the
“Tribune” and was annoyed when the
“boy power” shortage led to the disconti-
nuance of early-morning deliveries, so he took
the job. I dare say he has not lost a whit
of his essential dignity despite the bag of
papers flung over his shoulder every morn-
ing.

I consider myself very lucky to have
met and known someone like Bert Hale.
To me and Kelly, Kentucky, Bert Hale is
an institution as solid as the Rock of
Gibraltar.