Harry Mertus Benjamin

Harry Benjamin was born on November 20, 1896 in Hastings, Minnesota to William Abraham Benjamin (1854-1904) and Gesina Marie Omodt Benjamin (1857-1940). William was born in Vermont and was a cooper at the flour mill in Hastings. Gesina was born in Houston, Minnesota). William would die in 1904 leaving five children for Gesina to raise. Harry was only seven at the time. His two older brothers work for the railroad and help support the family.

On June 5, 1918 when Harry registers for the Draft he is 21, working for C.L. Methben in Hastings. He decides to enlist on August 15, 1918 and participated in the University of Minnesota – Student Army Training Corps. He trained as a switchboard operator in the trenches on campus. This area is now the University of Minnesota Hospital. The Armistice agreement was signed and the war ended. The Student Training Program was closed and everyone was discharged on December 14, 1918.

Using the training he received, Harry started working in the telephone business. First as a lineman and then for the Telephone Company of Hastings. He married Florence Severson (1911-1979), born in Ettrick, Wisconsin on August 5, 1933. By 1940 they have five children. In 1941 they lost their youngest to whooping cough at ten months. Harry worked for the telephone company until he retired in November of 1961 at the age of 65. At the time he retired, there were only 950 lines plus 20 more from Prescott, Wisconsin. Harry lost his wife in 1979 and he died on April 17, 1988 at the age of 91 in Hastings. He is buried at Lakeside Cemetery.