

Predictions from 1900

by John Elfreth Watkins, Jr.

A Note from the Editor

In the year 1900, life in America was more similar to what it had been in 1816, 84 years earlier, than to what it is now, 84 years later. "Horseless carriages" were just making their appearance west of the Mississippi. Women would not be allowed to vote for another twenty years. The Industrial Revolution had already produced many changes, but the age of modern technology had not yet begun. Air travel was considered a foolish dream. The telephone was a phenomenon of modern science.

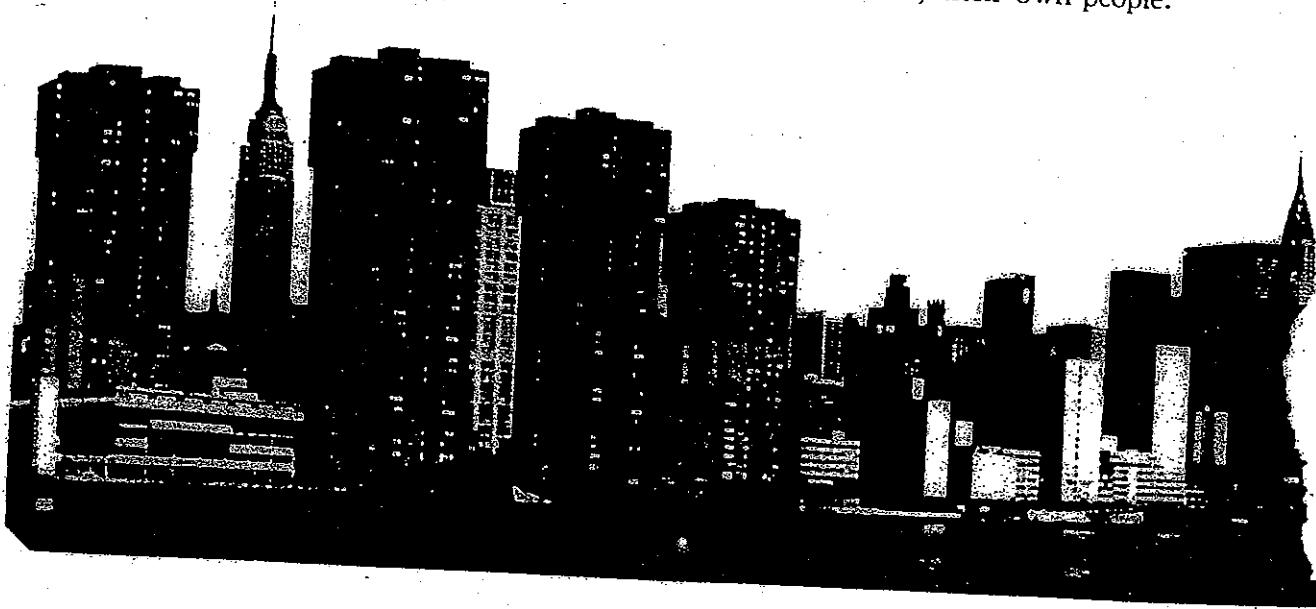
Imagine the likelihood of someone in 1900 being able to predict what life would be like now—and being at all accurate!

Someone did. He was a thirty-year-old journalist named John Elfreth Watkins, Jr. His predictions were published in the December 1900, issue of *The Ladies' Home Journal*. Watkins consulted with experts in many fields then made wide-ranging and imaginative guesses about life in the year 2000. While some things he predicted have not happened—and probably will not happen—he showed remarkable foresight—especially for a person of his era. We should remember that far more change has occurred in the last forty years than most people in earlier times would ever have thought possible.

Following are portions of John Watkins' original article.

1. Five hundred million people. There will probably be from 350 million to 500 million people in America and its possessions by the lapse of another century. Nicaragua will ask for admission to our Union

after the completion of the great canal. Mexico will be next. Europe, seeking more territory to the south of us, will cause many of the South and Central American republics to be voted into the Union by their own people.

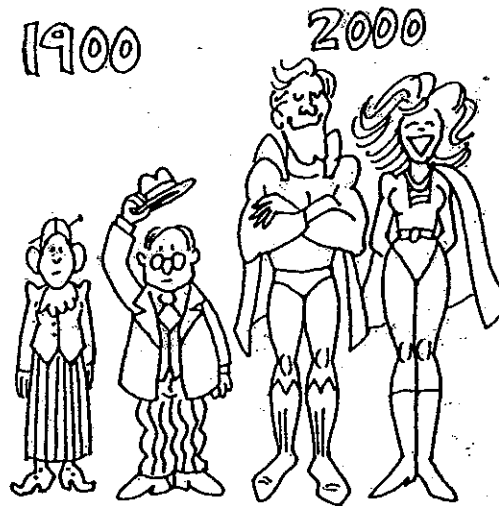


2. How children will be taught. A university education will be free to every man and woman. Several great national universities will have been established. Children will study a simple English grammar adapted to simplified English, and not copied after the Latin. Time will be saved by grouping like studies (similar subjects). Poor students will be given free board, free clothing and free books if ambitious and actually unable to meet their school and college expenses. Medical inspectors regularly visiting the public schools will furnish poor children free eyeglasses, free dentistry and free medical attention of every kind. The very poor will, when necessary, get free rides to and from school and free lunches between sessions. In vacation time poor children will be taken on trips to various parts of the world. Etiquette (proper manners and social behavior) and housekeeping will be important studies in the public schools.

3. The American will be taller by from one to two inches. His increase of stature will result from better health, due to vast reforms in medicine, sanitation, food and athletics. He will live fifty years instead of thirty-five as at present—for he will reside in the suburbs. The city house will practically be no more. Building in blocks will be illegal. The trip from suburban home to office will require a few minutes only. A penny will pay the fare.

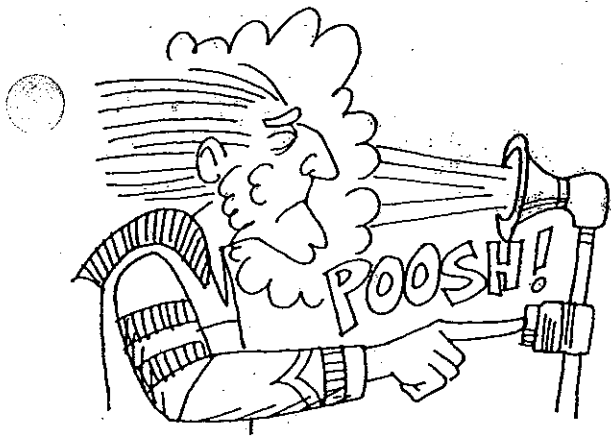
4. Few drugs will be swallowed or taken into the stomach unless needed for the direct treatment of that organ

Illustrated by Bill Ogden



itself. Drugs needed by the lungs, for instance, will be applied directly to those organs through the skin and flesh. They will be carried with the electric current applied without pain to the outside skin of the body. Microscopes will lay bare the vital organs, through the living flesh, of men and animals. The living body will to all medical purposes be transparent. Not only will it be possible for a physician to actually see a living throbbing heart inside the chest, but he will be able to magnify and photograph any part of it. This work will be done with rays of invisible light.

5. Everybody will walk ten miles. Gymnastics will begin in the nursery, where toys and games will be designed to strengthen the muscles. Exercise will be compulsory in the schools. Every school, college and community will have a complete gymnasium. All cities will have public gymnasiums. A man or woman unable to walk ten miles at a stretch will be regarded as a weakling.



6. Man will see around the world.

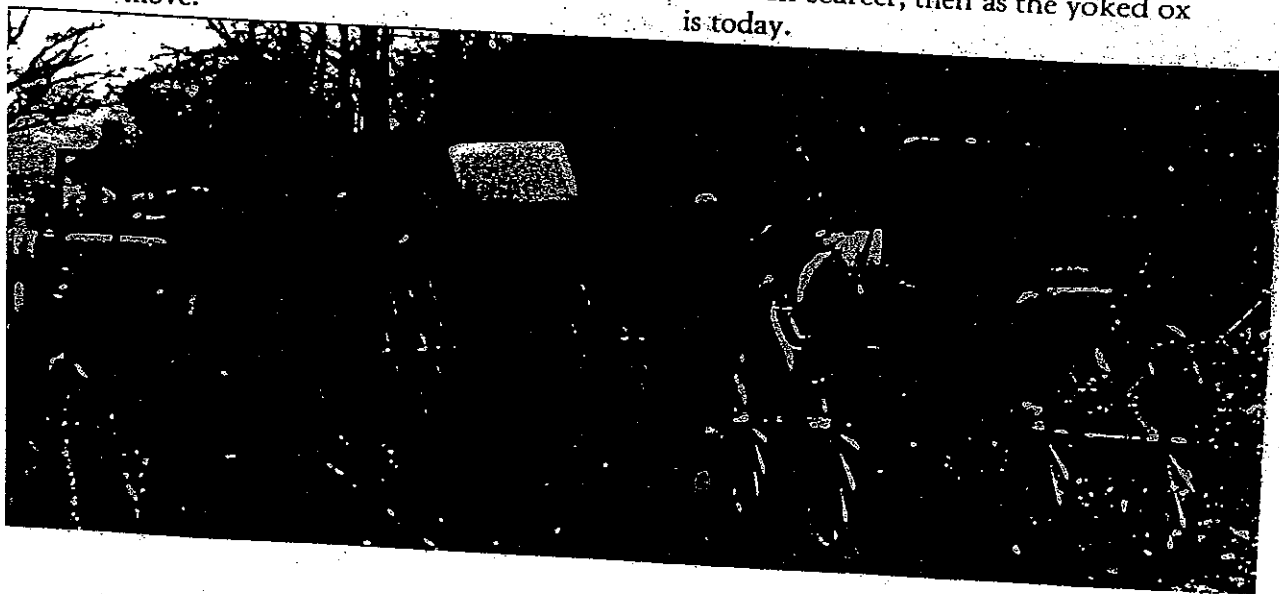
Persons and things of all kinds will be brought within focus of cameras connected electrically with screens at opposite ends of circuits, thousands of miles at a span. American audiences in their theatres will view upon huge curtains before them the coronations of kings in Europe or the progress of battles in the Orient. The instrument bringing these distant scenes to the very doors of people will be connected with a giant telephone apparatus transmitting each incidental sound in its appropriate place. Thus the guns of a distant battle will be heard to boom when seen to blaze, and the lips of a remote actor or singer will be heard to utter words or music when seen to move.

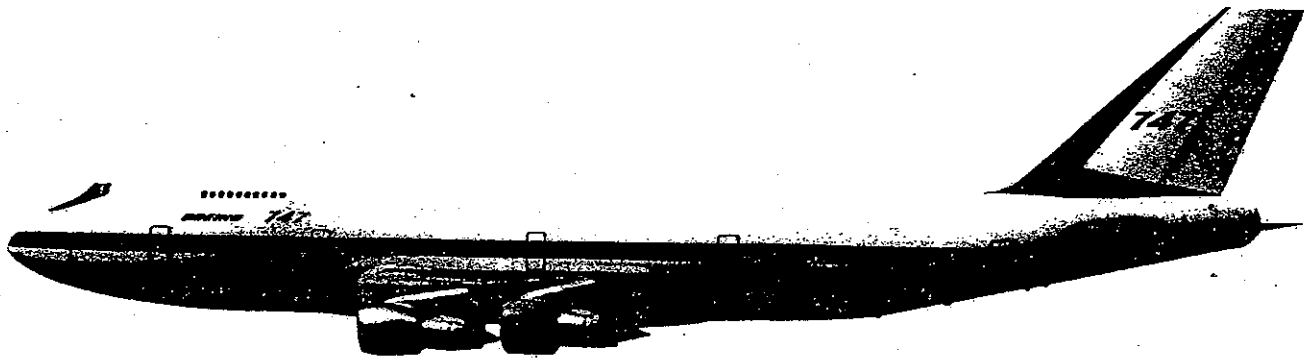
7. Hot and cold air from spigots.

Hot or cold air will be turned on from spigots to regulate the temperature of a house as we now turn on hot or cold water from spigots to regulate the temperature of the bath. Central plants will supply this cool air and heat to city houses in the same way as now our gas or electricity is furnished. Rising early to build the furnace fire will be a task of the olden times. Homes will have no chimneys, because no smoke will be created within their walls.

8. Automobiles Will Be Cheaper Than Horses are today.

Farmers will own automobile hay-wagoons, automobile truck-wagons, plows, harrows and hay-rakes. A one-pound motor in one of these vehicles will do the work of a pair of horses or more. Children will ride in automobile sleighs in winter. Automobiles will have been substituted for every horse vehicle now known. There will be, as already exist today, automobile hearses, automobile police patrols, automobile ambulances, automobile street sweepers. The horse in harness will be as scarce, if, indeed, not even scarcer, than as the yoked ox is today.





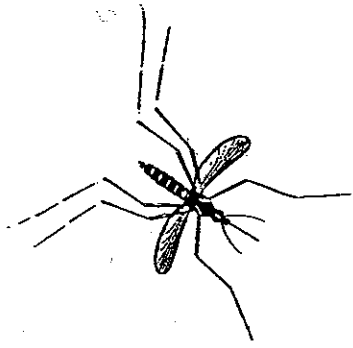
9. There Will Be Air-Ships, but they will not successfully compete with surface cars and water vessels for passenger or freight traffic. They will be maintained as deadly war-vessels by all military nations. Some will transport men and goods. Others will be used by scientists making observations at great heights above the earth.

10. Aerial War-Ships and Forts on Wheels. Giant guns will shoot twenty-five miles or more, and will hurl anywhere within such a radius shells exploding and destroying whole cities. Such guns will be aimed by aid of compasses when used on land or sea, and telescopes when directed from great heights. Fleets of air-ships, hiding themselves with dense, smoky mists, thrown off by themselves as they move, will float over cities, fortifications, camps or fleets. They will surprise foes below by hurling upon them

deadly thunderbolts. These aerial war-ships will necessitate bomb-proof forts, protected by great steel plates over their tops as well as their sides. Huge forts on wheels will dash across open spaces at the speed of express trains of today.

11. There Will Be No Street Cars in Our Large Cities. All hurry traffic will be below or high above ground when brought within city limits. In most cities it will be confined to broad subways or tunnels, well-lighted and well-ventilated, or to high trestles with "moving-sidewalk" stairways leading to the top. These underground or overhead streets will teem with capacious (roomy) automobile passenger coaches and freight wagons, with cushioned wheels. Subways or trestles will be reserved for express trains. Cities, therefore, will be free from all noises.





12. No Mosquitoes nor Flies. Insect screens will be unnecessary. Mosquitoes, house-flies and roaches will have been practically exterminated. Boards of health will have destroyed all mosquito haunts and breeding grounds, drained all stagnant pools, filled in all swamp-lands, and chemically treated all still-water streams. The extermination of the horse and its stable will reduce the house-fly.

13. There Will Be No Wild Animals except in menageries (zoos). Rats and mice will have been exterminated. The horse will have become practically extinct. A few of high breed will be kept by the rich for racing, hunting and exercise. The automobile

will have driven out the horse. Cattle and sheep will have no horns. They will be unable to run faster than the fattened hog of today. A century ago the wild hog could outrun a horse. Food animals will be bred to expend practically all of their life energy in producing meat, milk, wool and other by-products. Horns, bones, muscles and lungs will have been neglected.

14. Strawberries As Large As Apples will be eaten by our great-great-grandchildren for their Christmas dinners a hundred years hence. Raspberries and blackberries will be as large. One will suffice for the fruit course of each person. Strawberries and cranberries will be grown upon tall bushes. Cranberries, gooseberries and currants will be as large as oranges. One cantaloupe will supply an entire family. Melons, cherries, grapes, plums, apples, pears, peaches and all berries will be seedless. Figs will be cultivated over the entire United States.

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