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ALFRED VILLAGE 1913

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It may be of interest to present some of my impressions and memories of the Village of Alfred as it was in 1913.

I had visited Alfred several times prior to September 1913 when I arrived to enter Alfred University as a freshman in the Class of 1917. I came from Westerly, Rhode Island via the Erie to Alfred Station and thence by horse drawn stage or bus to the village over the macadam road constructed in 1895 at a cost of \$8,000.00. The high quality and availability of stone and gravel from the deposits at Alfred Station provided the material for the road which was reputed to be the best water bound macadam road in the area.

The horse drawn stages owned and operated by William W. Sheldon met the three east and west bound trains stopping each day at Alfred Station. When the students arrived or left it was necessary to use several stages. One of the drivers was Ollie Fuller whose passengers had an extra thrill in wondering if the stage would make the depot on time. I recall several trips when the train had arrived before the stage made the turn to go up Depot Hill. The other stage or stages had unloaded passengers and the train was delaying its departure until Ollie arrived. Bill Sheldon and the train crew would be on the platform yelling, "Come on Ollie." The stage would draw along side the train to let the passengers hustle aboard. Ollie enjoyed visiting with his passengers and he let the horses walk instead of trotting despite the risk of being late.

Alfred streets, illuminated by gas lights were, for the most part, gravel with sidewalks of flagstone which had the unfortunate tendency to heave. It took me several months to learn to pick up my feet and thus prevent sore toes.

There were not many automobiles owned in the village. Many of the barns now used as garages housed the family horse, buggy, surrey or sleigh and often a cow. Most of the automobiles were jacked up during the winter months, the tires and batteries removed and stored until spring. Snow was a problem. The sidewalks were plowed by an iron shod wooden snow plow drawn by one or two horses driven by Mont Collins. The streets were not plowed.

A large brick livery barn operated by William W. Sheldon was located in the rear of the Greene Block where the Alfred University maintenance building now stands. Here you could rent a horse, buggy, surrey or sleigh or make arrangements for straw rides, special trips by stage or take the regular trips to the depot.

A horse drawn stage to Hornell carried a few passengers and the driver executed errands. The Red Bus line, the first public motorized transportation to Hornell, commenced operations January 1, 1916 and was soon followed by another line. Frequent trips were made every day and the line was well patronized especially the late evening trip. The flat top of the Red Bus often served as an overflow for patrons unable to get seats inside. Needless to say the riders on the top of the bus were students.

Wooden church sheds located in the rear of the parsonage and the Bouck residence on Church Street were used by rural residents on their shopping and other visits to the village. Shopping areas were located at frequent intervals in the various towns and villages to accommodate customers dependent on horse drawn transportation.

The village had a water system with wells and springs located on the Water Wells Road on the corner of the road leading to Foster Lake. Many

homes still used their own wells. There was a flowing well and horse trough by the driveway between Omicron and the Frechette home. The village wells were connected by power rods to a central gas engine with a hook up similar to that used in pumping oil wells.

Frank Sisson, who lived in the house owned and occupied by Nate Tucker, was the local police officer on call night and day. Gum Shoe, as he was familiarly known was famous as a fox hunter who could trail on foot and run down foxes on Pine and nearby hills. This took stamina and a keen knowledge of fox habits.

He acted as game warden and umpired the local baseball games, adding much to the excitement and interest of the game. As might be expected he was heckled a great deal which heckling he usually took calmly. There was one heckler, however, who would be handcuffed to a willow tree by the creek when he became too noisy and offensive, and kept there until the end of the game.

Officer Sisson was kept busy on Halloween. A favorite trick was tipping over the out houses which lined the bank of the creek north of West University Street. Gum Shoe patrolled this area to catch the micreants and to make them replace the structures on the bank of the creek from where they came. A favorite yarn was about his stopping two prominent upper classmen near the Rogers Machine Shop as they left the bank of the creek. He informed them he had followed their progress from the bridge over West University Street by the sound of crashing out-houses. As he was upbraiding them with emphasis on how their parents would be shocked by their rowdy actions there was a crash as one of the out-houses which had lodged in the bushes gaye way and fell into the bed of the creek. He left in a hurry and sprinted to catch

the culprits who then quietly returned to their fraternity house on Reynolds Street.

A winter sport of the students was bobsledding down Chapel Hill from a starting point near the spot where Howell Hall now stands and after crossing Main Street traveling some distance up West University Street. As soon as the snow fell the ruts made by the sleds were carefully iced to increase the speed and the thrill of going over the crosswalks and "Thank You Marms." A watcher was posted on Main Street to stop the horse-drawn and other traffic and fun was enjoyed by all. When the snow was thin and the ruts well iced there were frequent spills at the crosswalks. I remember being the end man on the rear of a ten man bobsled when the snow was sparse but the ruts were well iced and slick. I had a stiff neck that day but decided to try one run down the hill and was thrown off the sled at a bump half way down. I landed on the ground sitting up, losing the seat of my pants and also the stiff neck. I have never advocated sliding as a cure-all for a stiff neck but it worked this time and I continued sliding in comfort.

A more thrilling and risky ride started on Jericho Hill and proceeded down the Main Street through the village. I never did this but once as the big drawback was dragging the heavy sled back up the hill.

Straw rides, properly chaperoned of course, were popular when the road was covered with snow and sleighs and sleds were in general use. A revival meeting in Andover gave a group of us a logical and reasonable reason for a straw ride one winter evening. We started for Andover by way of Jericho and the McAndrew Road on badly drifted roads. Mr. Sheldon soon left the highway and took to the open fields where the going was easier for the team of horses. Somewhere on the McAndrew Road in the darkness and blowing snow

we got lost and after aimless wandering between hay stacks and trees we decided to go back to Alfred when familiar land marks were recognized to show us where to go.

Football and baseball games, as well as intermural sports, were on the athletic field now known as Merrill Field. When not in use for athletic events it was used as a cow pasture by Frank Sison, the owner of the land. This sometimes presented additional hazards if the field had not been carefully checked before use as an athletic field. There were no grandstand or bleacher seats. The sidelines were therefore crowded which did not improve playing conditions. The field had a downward slope to the north which was either an advantage or disadvantage to the football and track teams.

Firemen's Hall was the scene of many activities. It housed the hand drawn hose and ladder carts and the steel cage which was the village lockup or jail. Local plays, fairs, wrestling matches, suppers and banquets were held there. Each Saturday night the Firemen put on a four reel program of movies.

Then, as now, there was a well organized volunteer Fire Department skilled in social as well as fire technics. When there was a fire everybody turned out to grab the ropes and help draw the two pieces of apparatus to the scene of the blaze. I remember one occasion when the Brick porch roof was being repaired and the smoke from the hot tar pot caused a false alarm. As the ladder cart was being rushed up the hill several of the young men at the pulling ropes fell down and the light but loaded cart ran over one of them causing more jeers than physical injury.

A much discussed fire occurred July 23, 1913 when a store building

owned by Alfred University located south of Carnegie Hall burned. The upstairs was unoccupied. Button's Meat Market and George Stillman's shop were on the ground floor.

The fire was well underway, when discovered, and there was a great difference of opinion among the firemen and spectators as to whether it could be saved or all-efforts should be confined to keeping the fire from spreading.

The rear of the building was torn down and the supports of the roof of the front porch were pulled down over the store windows to keep the fire from crossing the street. Sufficient water was poured into the fire to reduce its intensity. Although for some reason this often dwindled down to a trickle and in due time the building was totally consumed. There are many conflicting versions of what happened but all the spectators, which must have been everyone in the village, agree that the swarms of fleeing rats made an impressive and awesome spectacle. The ruins were soon cleared away and the cellar filled in by terracing to create a sunken garden pool stocked with goldfish and lilies, augmented at times by frogs, toads, Frosh and other extraneous objects.

In 1952 Prexie's Bath Tub was filled in and the lot regraded and landscaped. Most of the business places in 1913 were the same as stated in The Alfred Historical Society's Monograph No.1. A few not included were worthy of mention.

The hollow tile building on South Main Street between the homes of Ella Witter and the Clarence Mitchell's was a steam laundry. It now houses students after many years occupancy by the Alfred Grange.

The neat white building in the rear of Bob and Anna Campbell's home at 30 South Main Street was the factory where Earl Place made a very superior

grade of peanut butter sold in local and out of town stores.

The large building at 52 North Main Street now owned by Attorney Richard B. Tolins was operated as a hotel.

Kuppenheimer suits could be purchased at Sheff Bassett's store for \$16.50 to \$25.00, and Walkover shoes were \$3.50 to \$4.50.

Dinners at the Alfred Cafe were 35 cents.

I started eating at the Clan Alpine Boarding Club in Burdick Hall where we ate three square meals a day. Shortly after the pancake season opened I broke out with a rash and paid a visit to Dr. George Burdick at his office. He looked me over and asked if I was eating at Clan Alpine. When I said yes he told me I could either stop eating Mrs. King's buckwheat pancakes or to eat more of them. In either case the rash would soon go away. The fee for the examination and prescription was ten cents.

A place of morbid interest to college freshmen was Phil Place's Embalming Parlor. Phil had successfully developed an embalming fluid which had quite market.

As an advertisement and testimonial he had an embalmed body in a wooden case in his workshop north of the machine shop. This body was known as Jimmy.

Nearly every freshman was taken to view the mummified remains of Jimmy who presented a leather like and slightly moldy appearance. When the cover of the wooden case or box was lifted, some spectators passed out and some were suddenly sick but all were duly impressed.

In the spring of 1911 Jimmy made the news in papers read from New York to San Francisco when he was found in the Kenyon Memorial Hall auditorium where morning chapel exercises were held attended by most of the student body.



A careful perusal of the 1911 copies of the Alfred Sun does not disclose any mention of this event. In fact very few of the local pranks such as pulling a Brush car into Kenyon Hall, sheep into the Brick, changing an Alfred University sign at Alfred Station to Alfred Reformatory, Class flag rushes and proc fights ever made the local news. The Procs (Proclamations) were first posted in 1898 by the Class of 1901 and were a rough and ready student activity. The Proc were posted in conspicuous places around town and campus and gave mock advise and warnings to the Frosh who then endeavored to tear down and capture them for a trophy. As some of the Procs were guarded by Sophs there were often hot scrimmages. As the incoming classes grew larger and the scrimmages, by force of numbers more rough, the custom ended in 1916. The growth of the college enrollment also put an end to the Frosh and Soph banquets which were held secretly each year and which the rival class, aided and advised by upperclassmen, sought to crash. As an illustration of how times have changed the college registration as announced September 23, 1913 was 159. The entering Frosh class was about 60 including special students.

To bring this to a close I will quote from page 641 of the Centennial Memorial History of Allegany County published in 1896. "The town (Alfred) enjoys almost entire immunity from drunkenness, insanity, pauperism and crime. There has been so little ligation that no lawyer has ever been able to make even a fair living here." Nevertheless in 1913 the abandoned round kilns on the Terra Cotta field were soundproof; secluded and safe places for the final disposition of beer smuggled into the village from Hornell.