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\* \* \* \* \* VILLAGE OF ALFRED, 1909

A PAPER PREPARED BY

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My subject is a short history of the Village of Alfred but the main concentration is on the history of the Technical Institute. The school has completed a half century of service to the youth of New York State with its classes first held on October 14, 1909. The many changes that have taken place since that time demonstrate how the Institute has adapted its curriculums and activities to the needs of each succeeding generation of students that passed through its doors.

First I will begin with a brief sketch of the town itself. Alfred was not settled until about 1806 or 1807. Those of you who live in the eastern part of the State and who come from towns which were well established before the Revolutionary War might well question why the founding of Alfred did not occur until the early part of the 19th century. The reason is that this territory was the hunting ground of the bloody Iroquois Indians. The western door of their long house was located just over the hills at Canadea. In fact, Moses Van Campen, who first surveyed this locality, ran the gauntlet there. It was not until after the Revolutionary War and Sullivan's raid, which dispersed the tribes forever, that the white man could hope for any permanent settlements in this territory.

The early inhabitants of Alfred came originally from Rhode Island and were of the 7th Day Baptist faith. The 7th Day is still observed in the village, as you probably have noticed, since the stores, bank and post office are closed on Saturday. Like all pioneers, they were a hardy group.

Some of them made a second trip to Alfred bringing their families in covered wagons. The story of their lives, like that of all pioneers is one of privation, hardship and real suffering at times. 1818 was known as "the starving year." There was a frost every month--all through the summer, and the crops were so poor that by spring there was almost nothing to eat. Rodman Place (who settled at the southern end of the town near Jericho Hill) told his descendants afterwards that he became so weak he would walk around a log as he had insufficient strength to step over it. However, these hardy folk at once established a school and a church. Bethuel Church had the first select school located next to the site of the present post office. The building has since burned. This was started in 1836 and was the beginning of what was to be Alfred University. Since the Institute was a part of Alfred University in its early years, we may say that it was our beginning, too. The early select school that blossomed into an academy in 1843 under James R. Irish, and later under William C. Kenyon was chartered as Alfred University. We must always be grateful to these early citizens of Alfred, for the atmosphere of the village today is our inheritance from them. Perhaps you have noted that Alfred is a friendly, informal town. It has no slums, no industry sending smoke and smog to obscure the beautiful hills that surround it; no dives, and the nearest jail is 20 miles away. Some of the older inhabitants never lock their doors at night. There is something about Alfred that differs from any other town of its size. It is difficult to put your finger on that particular charm which is Alfred's but those of us who have been here for some years have found it a wholesome, delightful place to live.

The way Alfred received its name is lost in the mists of antiquity. However, legend has it that two Englishmen were traveling this way and while looking at the rolling hills and little valleys, one of them said, "This looks like King Alfred's country." And so Alfred it was called. This is the only University in the world named after Alfred the Great of England. When Alfred University celebrated its centennial in 1936, professors were sent from Oxford, England to represent the English universities at the exercises.

As I mentioned earlier, the Agricultural and Technical Institute was established in the fall of 1909. It was then known as the New York State School of Agriculture and was a part of Alfred University. It consisted of a school of agriculture for young men and a course in domestic science (now known as Home Economics) for young women. Looking at the deserted farms in this vicinity, one may well wonder why an agricultural school was started in this particular area. However, before years of erosion, a depression, two world wars and a tornado impoverished many farms around Alfred, it was a thriving agricultural center. Large dairy herds were pastured on the surrounding hills; and the smock of many sugar bushes rose from the woods during February and March. Most of the by-roads contained cheese factories and Allegany County was known for its cheddar cheese.

The life of the students in those days was marked by simplicity. In the early 1900's there were no cars. There was a dirt road to Hornell, (the nearest thing to a city--then and now--in the vicinity of Alfred) and the only way of reaching it was either via Dobbin and the "one-horse shay" or the Erie Railroad.

I will say, however, that in those early days the Erie passenger trains ran much more frequently than they do now, and all stopped at Alfred Station. This isolation, if we can call it that, made the students extremely creative in forming their own amusements. Movies and T. V. had not yet made their appearance, but the boys and girls enjoyed sleigh rides and hay rides, picnics, long drives to nearby Almond and Andover for oyster suppers and dancing, which was then taboo in Alfred. After nearly six years as a part of Alfred University, the management of the school was transferred to the New York State Department of Education. The course in Home Economics was abandoned and supplanted by a curriculum which enabled its graduates to teach in the rural schools. When I came in as secretary to the director in 1934, this, too, had been omitted from the curriculum and for a few years only boys were admitted to the school. There were in those days no dormitories nor was there a cafeteria. This gave rise to an abundance of student eating clubs and other purely social organizations.

Mr. Orvis was appointed director in April, 1936. Just prior to this the fortunes of the school had reached their lowest ebb. This in no way reflects upon the ability and talents of its previous directors. They had their problems in saving the bare existence of the school during a decade of lean years. This situation was brought about by: 1) lack of interest in the six agricultural institutes, 2) a depression during which the State Education Department was not spending any funds on expansion (a depression which left parents unable to afford advanced education for their children), and, 3) the decline in agriculture as an industry and other factors. When Mr. Orvis arrived upon the scene, he found a school with but 30 or 40 students--many of them not even high school graduates. As he has always

said, he inherited me with all the old equipment, old text books and old buildings. I believe that in dating events in the school during his regime, instead of using the usual date designations; namely, B. C. or A. D., we should use the letters B. O. and A. O. meaning before Orvis and after Orvis. With uncanny foresight he started replacing some of the abandoned curricula with those which he thought (and which eventually turned out to be) the important ones in future education. The girls returned to our campus for work in the field of secretarial science. With the mechanization of agriculture, a course in Rural Engineering consisting of farm machinery, sales and maintenance was inaugurated. At this point Mr. Hinkle came as assistant director. The industrial department was established. These courses proved to be a boon during World War II when the shops ran in three shifts (24 hours a day) training workers for war industries. A Naval Pilot Training unit was added temporarily as the school's contribution to the war effort. The cadets took their ground training at Alfred, living in Bartlett, and their flight training in Dansville, occupying the old sanitarium there.

In three years Mr. Orvis had increased the registration of the 30 or 40 students to a registration of 354 young men and women. The Institute has grown under his guidance proving his genius for administration to the school. You now see it with over 1400 students and many more turned away each year for lack of space and instructional staff.

The school has always had veterans. Some were here after World War I, and in World War II we started with one young man who had been wounded at Pearl Harbor. The number grew during the years of 47, 48 and 49 until we had some 500 or 600 students annually. The school was originally planned for 250 students, and up until 1952 no additional buildings had been erected although our registration had more than trebled. With the addition of the Industrial Building in 1953, Radio, Coinical Laboratory Technology and other courses were all brought under one roof from rented or outlying buildings. In 1948 when the State University of New York was established, the Agricultural and Technical Institute, as it was then called, became one of its component units. It reached the status of a full-fledged junior college and could grant the degree of Associate in Applied Science. Mr. Orvis has had three extended absences since he became our director. During World War II he was in Europe with the rank of major. When the Marshall Plan was inaugurated in 48-49, he and Mrs. Orvis were stationed in Paris, France for two years where Mr. Orvis was Agricultural Chief in all the 17 countries outside the Iron Curtain. Again in 1954 he was called to serve the government and went to Israel for two years as Project Chief of the economic aid to Israel including agriculture, and education. During these absences, Mr. Hinkle, our Assistant Director, was the Acting Director and to him also must be accorded a large share of credit for the success of the Institute.

Now as most of you are living in or near Alfred, perhaps you would be interested to learn a little bit about some of the buildings. One of the oldest structures, if not the oldest one, is the yellow building just this side of the large dairy barn. The house to which I refer is situated just where North Main Street joins the Belmont Road. This was

originally an Inn, and during the early days the stage coaches stopped there on the way to the county seat at Angelica. One of the big social events in those times were the assemblies (as they were called) which were held there. Members of the militia would drive in or ride horseback from miles around bringing their wives and sweethearts. While the men drilled in the afternoon the ladies prepared a bountiful dinner which was enjoyed by all, after which a grand affair was held in the ballroom located on the top floor. Soldiers preparing to go to the Civil War drilled there.

Another interesting house is that known as the Wingate House situated on North Main Street next to the Delta Sig Fraternity. This, too, was an old inn, possibly older than the one I have just described. Here, also, the stage coaches stopped to bring the mail (the nearest post office being then situated at Bath), leave and take on passengers, and possibly get warm refreshments or change horses for the remainder of the journey. This old house has some interesting stories connected with it.

You have probably all been to Glidden Galleries. If not, it is well worth a special trip to see it. This, too, is an interesting old house. Darwin Maxson, one of the celebrated ministers in the 7th Day Baptist faith occupied it during Civil War times. He was an ardent abolitionist and used it as one of the stations on the underground railway where escaped slaves were hidden. Just how they reached Alfred and how they got to safety, I do not know. I assume they were secreted in freight cars on the Erie Railroad, and possibly taken from Alfred over the hill to the Genesee River. From here, if they could get by boat to Rochester and Lake Ontario, the way was clear to Canada and freedom.



The Allen Steinheim Museum is another interesting building, situated on the University campus above their new student union. I regret that it is not open to the public at the present time. It was built by Jonathan Allen, the second president of Alfred University. President Allen was an enthusiastic geologist, scientist and collector. He also traveled quite extensively for those days. After an European trip he decided to build the Steinheim to house his treasures and be a monument as well as mausoleum to himself and his faithful wife. The building was patterned after a castle on the Rhine and called the Steinheim, a German name meaning stone home. It was built with stones which were brought to this area from Canada and Laborador by the great glacier which covered this territory centuries ago, and to which we owe our hills, all of which are glacial deposits. President Allen had all the children in town picking up stones for him. All of them came from within a ten-mile limit of the village. The Steinheim houses wonderful collections of shells, American Indian relics, geological specimens as well as a fine collection of Alfredana. There is a small niche on the stairway which holds an ancient Grecian urn. He designated that after their deaths it should hold the ashes of himself and his wife. Dr. Allen died first and his ashes were deposited in the urn as directed, but in later years after his wife died it was found that there was insufficient room for her ashes. Dr. Birms, first director of the College of Ceramics and for whom Birms Hall was named, was one of the greatest potters in the world. He analyzed the clay of which the ancient vase was made and put an addition on it so now the ashes of this loving couple are mixed. Although he used great skill in the job, you can still see a little ridge where the addition was put on.

Architects have told us that our village church is one of the finest examples of the architecture of that period to be found anywhere. Take an extra look at its steeple and see how the square tower blends into the pointed steeple. This is the same architectural principle that was used in the famous Chartres Cathedral in France. The Gothic Chapel is another old and interesting building. Dr. Binns, who was an Englishman, started the Episcopal services there shortly after he came in 1901. It was then part of a larger building which had to be destroyed to make room for the new library. However, this portion of the original building was saved through the efforts of Miss Humphrey and is still used for religious services.

The carillon which you hear each Friday night and Sunday afternoon is another feature of Alfred which has an interesting history. As you know, many of the cities and towns in Europe have their bells. The Alfred Bells are ancient European ones. Many of them were buried during the two world wars, as those which came into the hands of the Germans were all melted up to be used for copper shells. The Alfred Bells were founded by Hemony, one of the greatest Flemish bell founders. Some of the bells were founded as early as 1674. In speaking of bells, I have learned that you say founded instead of made. The first group came to Alfred in 1937. Shortly after that the second World War commenced and the remainder had to be buried once more, but they were safe underground. At the close of the hostilities the remainder were brought to Alfred.

Another unusual thing about the Alfred carillon is that it is played by hand and not mechanically operated as is the case with many bells in this country. These which are electrically operated have somewhat the quality of a player piano, and the music lacks the expression and beauty of those played by hand. We are fortunate in having Mr. Wingate who is one of the finest carilloneurs in the country.