

Written in 1901, the following interesting reminiscences are from the pen of Mary Sheldon Powell, then 84 years old. Her remarks were prepared as a program for the Alfred Amandine Club.

“A common school education required a knowledge of arithmetic, grammar, geography, reading, writing and spelling. In Webster’s spelling book were several pages of orthography which we were obliged to commit to memory. It began thus—*Language or speech is the utterance of articulate sounds rendered significant by usage for the expression and communication of thought.* It was like Latin to me until years later.

One day, in 1839, our teacher said, ‘There is to be an exhibition at the Corners in Alfred Academy tomorrow; I wish some of you could attend.’ A girl schoolmate about my age, thirteen years, went home with me and early the next morning we started on the foot for Alfred Academy, four miles away. James R. Irish, the pleasant voiced teacher, called the names of the eldest and more advanced students, who came forward and spoke from the platform, either original or otherwise. The younger ones read their compositions standing by their seats. I well remember Clark Burdick read a composition, subject, *Spring*. He said it was pleasant to see the squirrels skipping from branch to branch upon the trees and to breathe the pure air and to see the flowers; and pleasant sunshine and to him it was the most pleasant season of the year. The exercises ended, Prof. Irish bade the students goodbye and presented to them their new teacher, William C. Kenyon, a classmate of his in Union College, who arose and with quick impulsive movement, addressed the students upon the advantages of education, prefatory to meeting the great responsibilities of life. He said he did not know that he could fill the place of their beloved teacher, but with God’s help, he would do the best he could. His words were magnetic inspiration. All the students seemed anxious to return at the end of a week’s vacation. I, too, wished to be one of them. My parents had six children to care for, how could they let me go? Finally, my mother said she thought she could spare enough for butter to pay my tuition which was \$1.50 for a term of thirteen weeks; and my father would sell enough grain to pay my other expenses. So at the end of three weeks my father drove to the door, loaded in feather bed, bedding a chair and box of provisions. Arriving at the Academy and supposing I could find a place almost anywhere, I found every room was more than filled. Uncle Amos Burdick came along and said to my father, ‘Go home with me to dinner and maybe ma will take your little girl.’ She did, and when I went in said: ‘you are to be my little girl this term, are you?’ To me she was a true mother for the year; at the close of which I engaged to teach a district school near my home, three months at 75 cents per week and board. At the end of that time I was engaged to teach a month longer at \$1.00 per week, for which I was the proud professor of \$13. My father needed \$10 of it to pay taxes, leaving me with \$3.00, and never afterwards when receiving \$1.00 per day was I better satisfied. In the meantime the west chapel was built (now called the Thompson house) and when opened three hundred students were present, every seat being filled. The second and third stories were used for students who wished to board themselves. As there was no school of its kind in all the neighboring counties, a necessity came for more room and more teachers. The North or Gentlemen’s Hall, the Middle of Boarding Hall, which was occupied by Prof. Kenyon and family, and the South or Ladies’ Hall were built. The rooms on the first floor in the Middle Hall were occupied by the ladies’ boarding hall. The second floor was the chapel where all the students met

for chapel exercises. It was also used as a recitation room and for speaking, etc. Prof. Kenyon urged all the students to take exercise, not allowing what would endanger life of limb. 'Take a brisk morning walk, which will strengthen every muscle of the body,' he said. Marching in chapel with vocal and instrumental music by ladies and gentlemen together, was much enjoyed. Uncle Maxson Green and his wife, who was a sister of my mother, and who had donated largely for the school, and who expected to give more, thought this exercise too much like dancing and thought of withholding further help. As they regarded my mother's advice, they drove four miles to talk it over with her. My mother told them if Prof. Kenyon allowed it she did not believe there was wrong in it as he had always labored for the best interest of his students. They decided that way, too, and gave the needed help.

Prof. Kenyon hated stupidity. He being the author of a grammar, it was as plain to him as A B C. He said one day to a young man, who was attempting to analyze a difficult sentence, 'Young man, you don't know anything,' adding, 'as you ought to know it.' Delinquent students were watched and study hours rigidly observed. No one was allowed to bother others in study hours. Keen watch care followed law breakers at night as well as day. Money was needed in the different departments. Prof. Kenyon gave notice to the voters and others that he would speak on Main Street at a certain date for a loan of \$10,000. His plea for the benefit of students who were flocking to the Alfred school was most enthusiastic as well as pathetic. Miss Elvira Stillman and Elisha Potter, both advanced students, sat by a window in the upper story of Judge Crandall's house bathed in tears. His speech ended, he asked the voters who favored the loan to pass up street and those opposed, in the opposite direction. Nearly all passed up street. I well remember the voice of Orsumus Palmiter as he pointed to the opposing side saying, 'See! What a ragged, ignorant looking set!' This raised a loud laugh much to their disgust. The loan was obtained.

In 1853, a young man named William Kinney, attended a party with his girl (Dell Anderson) at Almond without an excuse, returning very late. He refused to apologize. It was near the close of the school year, and as he was a graduate, would not be allowed to speak. A few of his classmates took sides with him, and of course their diplomas would be withheld. Lester C. Rodgers and Nathaniel Hubbard were among them. The corps of teachers met and the question was: 'Shall we maintain the rules of the school?' Just then Prof. T. Dwight Thacher came and was asked the question. He replied, 'Yes, maintain them through the heavens fall.' Darwin E. Maxson said, 'Amen,' and so said they all. Prof. Kenyon then said, 'Anniversary exercises will commence tomorrow at precisely ten O'clock.' At this time a large multitude gathered, as Horace Greeley was to be speaker of the day. Mr. Kinney had sent a dispatch that he need not come as the school was all broken up and his services would not be needed. He was not there. Prof. Thacher explained why Greeley did not come, when Kinney arose and said, 'I demur, Mr. Thacher has not stated the circumstances correctly.' A shower of hisses drowned his voice and he sat down. In later years, Judge Hubbard of the Supreme Court of Iowa, came to Alfred. As he stepped upon the platform he said, 'I have come back to speak my piece.' He spoke most earnestly of the great good accomplished by a strict discipline in the school of which he was a most loyal supporter. Lester C. Rogers was later given the chair in Alfred University endowed by Charles Potter, and did all he could to advance the principles of its noble president, William C. Kenyon, whose health having failed, had crossed the

ocean in search of better health, visiting Germany and returning via London. He was anxious to take passage on a steamer which was to sail the next morning, saying he had an unfinished work to do in Alfred and must go. His physician dissuaded him and before morning his spirit had returned to God who gave it.

But I have not yet spoken of our most beloved preceptress, Miss Caroline B. Maxson, who met us girls Wednesday afternoons for one hour, giving advice and telling us to ask questions. I cannot better describe her character than by giving what she wrote in my album:

‘Life is but a link in a chain of endless years. A leaf from the tree of immortality.

Brief as it is, it is allotted for noble purposes. Each day should be a record of holy aims, high resolves and lofty accomplishments.

An eternity is before us, and the duties of life are too pressing to allow time for indolence and inactivity, too important to give place to frivolous amusements and visionary schemes.

May each leaf of the life dear M. be so filled that no tears of remorse shall bedew its pages and may the great Recorder so approve thy deeds that he will register thy name in the ‘Book of Life.’ Your friend, C.B.M”

Mary A. Sheldon Powell

After a long and useful life, Mary A. Sheldon Powell passed away quietly at her home on North Main Street, Thursday, September 18th, 1919. She was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Sheldon and was born in Alfred, May 14th, 1825. At the time of her death she was 94 years, four months, and four days of age. She had always claimed Alfred and vicinity as her home and was Alfred's oldest resident. She had so well retained the powers of both body and mind that no one thought of her as lacking only a little over five years of having reached the century mark.

At the age of three years she commenced attending school, and made such rapid progress at eight years of age she could repeat the most of Kirkham's Grammar.

When fourteen years of age, she entered the school at Alfred that has since become Alfred University, in the year 1839, and graduated with the class of 1849. For many years she most successfully followed teaching.

December 17, 1871 she and Jason Powell were united in holy wedlock. Mr. Powell died September 22nd, 1884. She was a member of a large family but is survived by one sister, Phoebe Fowler of Lamont, Iowa, who is now 90 years of age.

When thirteen years of age she made a profession of religion and was baptized and joined the First Seventh Day Baptist Church of Alfred. Of this church she remained a most worthy and faithful member till death, a period of eighty-one years.

It had been hers to behold nearly the entire history of Alfred. She was a member of the church during every pastorate and Alfred University was only a select school in its third year when she became a student therein. Her life had been one of Christian helpfulness, womanly grace and a Godly example.

Funeral services conducted by Pastor William L. Burdick, assisted by Pres. Boothe C. Davis, were held at the house Sabbath afternoon, and interment took place in Alfred Rural Cemetery.