

ANECDOTES OF ALFRED

Collected by R. Arta Place for an Athenaeum Lyceum Program'

The history of the early settlers of any country or locality is much the same. It is a story of hardships and privation and often, of real suffering.

The story of the early settlers of Alfred is no exception to the rule. I have never heard that they had any great fights with wild beasts, although as late as 1835, there was some excitement caused by a bear which ambled by the Inn which was kept by James Spicer.

The early settlers did have a fight to obtain enough provisions to satisfy the needs of their bodies. There is a story told of a certain large family which became so destitute of food that they dug up the potatoes which had been planted.

Uncle Elisha Coon borrowed some corn of Rodman Place and was to pay in rye when it ripened. When the rye was needed, the crop was not ripe enough to cut, so Uncle Elisha went through the field with his sickle and cut off the ripest heads. These were put in a big potash kettle and dried out so they could be shelled out by hand. In this way, they got a peck of grain. This, they put in bags and sent by a boy on horseback to Almond to be ground.

The Hull family, of which Eld. N. V. Hull was a member, suffered greatly from lack of food and Eld. Hull could not speak of those days without tears coming to his eyes. The children who went to school were so weak that it was an effort for them to get around.

One day, someone gave the family a ham bone from which the best part of the meat had been taken. This the mother boiled, cooked some dried peas in the water and on their return from school, the children sat down to a feast. They often spoke of how good this soup tasted.

You have all undoubtedly heard your father, or grandfather, tell of the good, old days and of the cornbread their mothers used to make, baked in a bake-kettle

over the coals, the like of which they never tasted now; or of the johnnycakes baked on a board before the fire which their wives and daughters with all the luxuries of civilization, could never equal.

Speaking of these old fireplaces, an old lady in town said it was a work of skill to build a fire in those days. First, your backlog, some four or five feet long must be rolled into the back of the fireplace; another smaller one must be put against that, then the andirons were shoved against these logs, and between them and on top was piled the smaller wood. It was a tedious process and it was a long time before the room began to be comfortably warm. Here was done the cooking for the family. What could not be done in kettles and skillets over the coals was baked in the large brick oven built into the side of the fireplace, some three or four feet from the floor. When this was to be used on baking day, a fire was built in it and when reduced to coals, it was carefully cleaned out, often with a chicken or turkey wing brush, and the food to be baked was set in upon the hot bricks. When the days baking was done, sometimes a peck of apples was poured into the oven and left all night and in the morning, they were in fine shape to eat.

The women of the household had, in addition to their duties in the preparation of food, quite largely the manufacture of the clothing worn by the whole family. When the wool was sheared from the sheep, it must be cleansed and sent to a carding mill to be made into rolls - long strings of wool about as large around as your finger. Then it was ready for the spinning. Upon the road to Almond is the remains of the old carding mill to which, within my memory, my father sent wool to be carded.

The girls of the family, as soon as they were big enough, must learn to knit and spin. Forty knots a day were considered a days work for the spinner and a brisk worker could knit a pair of socks in two days. When the wool was spun, it must be colored and was then ready for knitting into socks and stockings, or to

be woven into cloth as needed.

For their summer clothing, they had homemade linen. When the flax was ripe, it was pulled and laid on the grass to rot off the outside of the stalk; then it was subjected to the break, which took off the greater part of the inside stalk; then, it was hatched, which is drawn through a coarse-toothed instrument, something like a curry comb, which separated the fiber into two classes. The longest part was spun into thread which was used as warp. The short fiber was made into bats and spun into tow, which was used as filling.

In the spring of 1818, David Stillman started, with his family, from Petersburg (Berlin) Rensselaer County, New York to come to Alfred where Mr. Stillman had purchased a piece of land the year before of John Teater who moved to Independence, and was the first settler in that town. The family consisted of Mr. Stillman, his wife and three children, a daughter eight years old (Lavina,) another four years old (Amanda,) and a little baby (Orra,) and Mrs. Stillman's brother, Peter Rose.

They started out in a covered wagon drawn by two yoke of oxen, and leading a cow. On the way, Mr. Stillman bought a horse to help the oxen with their load. They were four weeks on the road and it rained every day but one.

Of course, on such a long, tedious journey a little toddy once in awhile would help to keep up the spirits of the company and even four year old Amanda came in for a share. On one occasion after she had had some, her Uncle Peter, who did not want his, gave her his share too and it was soon discovered that the little girl was dead drunk. What to do with her, they did not know, and they did not know but what she might die. But someone whom they met on the road told them to give her some fresh milk. This they did and the whiskey and milk refusing to agree, she threw them both up. When she could speak, her Uncle Peter said to her, "Amanda, do you want some whiskey?" and she answered faintly, "Yes."

The family lived in a log house for several months until the new frame house could be in readiness. And this house, which is the one in which Charles Stillman now lives, was the first public house or hotel in town. The Spicer Tavern was built at the same time. In the large ballroom of this house, was served the dinner for General Training which was the meeting of a Company of the State Militia for a days drill. In the evening, the room was cleared for the Grand Ball which always followed the days training. It was a great occasion and the wives and sweethearts of the men were present to see the drill and to take part in the merrymaking in the evening. We know of one young man (Philip Greene) who went to Independence and brought his best girl over to General Training, she riding behind him on horseback.

One thing which I have always heard spoken of in connection with this event was the cards of gingerbread which were greatly in evidence at this time and, which, from Hearsay I should judge, were a little better than any other kind of gingerbread.

The second Public House or Hotel built in Alfred was the one in which Mrs. Silas Burdick now lives. It was built by Mr. James Spicer. In those days, a house or barn raising was an event in the community, and the strong men were invited to help.

One essential to a successful raising was the whiskey which the host supplied for the strengthening of his helpers and to add to the general festivity of the occasion. When the great beams were in place, ready for the rafters, the men who were assisting would stand upon the plates and repeat together:

"This is a good frame
And deserves a good name
And what shall we call it?"

Whereupon they would give to the building a name, and to conclude the ceremony, the whiskey jug would be produced (in all probability empty by this time,) and with a flourish, it would be thrown as far as strong arms could sent it, and if the jug

came down whole, it was a good omen for the building. In this case, across from the new frame were some sheds and a haystack and the jug was so carefully thrown that it alighted upon the haystack and the house was thus started with a propitious omen.

In this house was born, and grew up, the girl who became the wife of Luke Greene and mother of Orson and Selinda Greene. They went to housekeeping in two of the upstairs rooms, each 14x14, in company with another young married couple. One of the rooms contained a great fireplace. This was their living room and the other room was curtained off for bedrooms. One of the young men was a cobbler and a part of the living room was given up to his cobblers bench.

Here these young wives began their housekeeping. How many young wives today would be willing to begin, even by themselves, in only two rooms? When the young wife, Irene Greene, came to take her first meal upstairs, she was homesick and cried, being so far from home.

Here was born David Greene and when he was old enough to be taken out of doors, the nurse (Nancy Satterlee) who was also the hired girl as was the custom in those days, knowing that a child should never be taken downstairs before he was taken up, took little David in her arms and climbed up the stones of the chimney into the attic, there being no stairs by which to get up.

This house was afterward sold to Amos Burdick who had three sons, William C., Milo and Silas. It is interesting to note that, even in those days, when drinking of liquor was so common, that here and there was found a woman who had pronounced temperance principles. It is related of Mrs. Burdick that she refused to move into this hotel with her boys if liquor was to be sold there. Although a license had been issued, Mr. Burdick never sold anything stronger than cider.

Have you ever heard of the Irish Raid? It was at the time the Erie Railroad was being built through the Station, then known as Bakers Bridge. There was a large gang of Irishmen located there with their families. One of their number was

arrested for some misdemeanor and brought up to the Centre. The Irish were quite aroused and a mob started on foot to come and rescue their comrade. They were armed with picks and shovels or any implement that came handy. Many of them were barefoot, and the women joined the mob armed with rocks carried in the toe of a stocking or sock. They came up the road talking loudly and threateningly and it looked as though it would be a dangerous thing to oppose them. There was, at that time, a Company of the State Militia here, composed of residents of the town, and they had an old brass cannon among their paraphernalia and when the news reached town that the mob was coming, as in some way it did, this old cannon was gotten out and loaded with stones, nails and bits of chain and anything else that was available. A chalk line was placed across the road, somewhere where John Tisdell now lives (the Robins place, now McSeans) and the Silas Burdick house. Several men with guns stood behind this line and when the Irishmen came up, they were told that the first man who stepped over it was a dead man. They hesitated, and about that time the cannon had been gotten in working order and more men came dragging it around the corner. At the sight of this formidable weapon, the mob dropped their picks and shovels and took to their heels. Some of them slid off the bank down into the creek and others went pattering down the dusty road. And that was the end of the raid. A number of them, as they went by the David Stillman House, stopped to get a drink from the old fashioned bucket that hung in the well and they seemed as peaceably inclined as one could wish.

There is an amusing story told of two young ladies who attend Alfred Academy in those early days. These girls were cousins whose homes were some miles out of the village and who had a room in town and brought their board for the week, as some of the young people do today. One evening these young ladies had a gentleman caller whom they were pleased to see, but of whom they were rather in awe. You may not know, but a tallow candle burns about so long, and then it needs

to be snuffed or it burns dim and is in danger of going out. It is rather a nice operation to snuff a candle gracefully, and a little timidity or nervousness is sometimes fatal to the light. The young man made quite an extended call and after awhile, the candle needed snuffing, but neither of the young ladies felt equal to the task or hoping that the other would do it, and finally the young man took pity on them and snuffed the candle himself.

The stories of the pranks played by the students upon each other or upon their teachers would fill a good-sized book. The rules were very strict and any intercourse between the young ladies and gentlemen was forbidden.

President Kenyon, as you have often heard, was rather a severe, quick-tempered man and no one cared to incur his displeasure. Some young men, knowing about the doings of certain young ladies, planned to play a joke upon them, and one morning they each received a note requesting them to be present at Faculty Meeting that evening, signed W.C.K. Of course, the girls were pretty badly scared and talked it over as to what they should plead guilty to. That evening, with fear and trembling, they made their way to Faculty Meeting. President Kenyon greeted them very cordially and expressed himself as glad to see them. When they were seated, they discovered that a certain gentleman of some importance was a visitor. The business proceeded and it finally dawned on them that they were the subjects of a practical joke. They were not at a loss to know who the perpetrators were, but nothing was said, though they determined to get even. Some time elapsed. It was planned that these young people were to go over to Philips Creek to spend the evening with a family with whom they were acquainted. One account of the strict rules, it was planned that the young ladies were to start out in a rig by themselves just before dark, and the young men were to follow a little later. The young ladies started off all right, but when they got over to Five Corners, they turned back another road and came back to Alfred, and reached here about eight

o'clock. The young men, starting a little later and expecting any moment to overtake the girls, went on over to Philips Creek and when they got to their destination, the place was dark, the family being in bed, not having expected any company. Of course, the young men were not slow to understand the situation.

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1904

Ruth Artamesia Place

Miss Ruth Artamesia Place of 12 Chapel Street, Almond, died July 18, 1960 at the Harris Nursing Home in Hornell, where she had been a resident for six weeks. She was 88 years old.

Born at Nile, N. Y., she was the sixth child born to Alvin Ayers and Ruth Sherman Place.

In 1881, the family moved to Scio, where Mr. Place became the pastor of the Scio Seventh Day Baptist Church. When about thirteen years of age, she and several others in her Sabbath School class were baptized in the Genesee River, by the Rev. Jared Kenyon.

She matriculated at Alfred University in 1889.

In 1895, the family moved to Alfred and her membership was transferred to the Alfred Seventh Day Baptist Church where she has been a member since that time.

For a number of years she served in the Primary Sabbath School. She was from her early girlhood a worker in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and was one of the charter members of the Allen Civic-Amandine Club.

For many years she was the custodian of the Steinheim, the University museum.

Survivors include several nieces and one nephew.

Funeral services were held at the First Seventh Day Baptist Church here yesterday afternoon at 2 p.m., with the Rev. Hurley S. Warren officiating. Burial was in Alfred Rural Cemetery.