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# Off to school in the past century: a story of early education in Niagara County and the Town of Royalton

Ruth D. Allport

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OFF TO SCHOOL IN THE PAST CENTURY

A story of early education in Niagara County and the Town of Royalton

Literature 360:  
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Ruth D. Allport

*A. E. Allport*

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to some good friends who have lived, for more than eight decades, in this community. Their reminiscing and recall of early school experiences have afforded me a great deal of pleasures and information. It is to Mrs. Winifred Sawyer and Miss Laura Smith, of Gasport, Mr. Frank Sheldon, Mr. Fred Hagadorn and Miss Belle Davison, of Middleport, Mrs. Cora Brigham, of Lockport, and Mr. Willis D. LaBar, of Rochester, that I am extremely grateful.

Also, it is to Mrs. Dorothy Baker, of Gasport, that I am indebted for the discovery of a hand-written history of school experiences in 1864. Its story aroused an interest which led me to endeavor to learn some of the later developments in the life of the author and his cousin. The discovery that the writer had lived on the farm adjoining my own early home provided an additional motive for study.

## OFF TO SCHOOL IN THE PAST CENTURY

### CHAPTER I

#### LOGS FOR LEARNINGS

One cannot study the pioneer efforts to establish educational opportunities in this area without sensing the comparative attitude of apathy which seems to exist in many instances to-day. Perhaps the comfort and ease with which our schools are surrounded, the ready transportation, the available equipment and supplies, the diversified activities and even "frills", have removed the motives and ideals which hardship and struggle create.

Earliest records indicate that the building and maintaining of schools was of prime importance and was given first consideration after new settlements were made. Surely these efforts involved great dedication and sacrifice.

The late Charles Richardson, of Middleport, recalled,

"It was shortly after my grandfather, Elias Richardson, purchased two hundred twenty acres of land from the Holland Land Company, sometime between 1818 and 1825, that he realized the need of a school building. Those were the days of large families, some with seven, eight, or even twelve children, so schools had an average enrollment of forty-five pupils."<sup>1</sup>

It was reported that the earliest schoolhouse in Royalton was located on land given by Joshua Slayton and his brother, who were credited with the first clearing of land, sowing of wheat and planting of orchard from 1800-1805.<sup>2</sup>

Although the exact date of this log school is not certain, it was probably as early as 1818.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Charles Richardson, "Reminiscing", Union-Sun and Journal, August 26, 1954.

2. Catherine C. Maynard, "Early History of Gasport and Orangeport", (Prepared for report at Gasport Study Club, 1950).

3. William Pool, Landmarks of Niagara County, New York, p.278.

That schools were a matter of first consideration is evident in examining the first written records of the Town of Royalton. In April, 1818, the first recorded meeting of the settlers was held at the home of Almon Millard. At that time, town officers were chosen and among them were three school commissioners. It was voted that forty dollars should be raised by tax, at the next session of the Board of Supervisors, for the support of the common schools.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after that early meeting, "The Commissioners of the common schools met on the twentieth day of April, for the purpose of dividing said town into school districts."<sup>2</sup>

The numerous accounts of meetings during the six years which followed, indicate that perhaps the most important business transacted at each session was the altering of school districts and the allotment of monies.

On April 6, 1819, Elias Richardson was elected commissioner of schools and six school inspectors were chosen.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, it was ordered by the town meeting that "thirty dollars be raised with the tax to defray town expenses, and for the support of the common schools and school teachers."<sup>4</sup>

In April, 1824, (~~1827~~), it was decided that school commissioners and inspectors of common schools should be paid one dollar per day for each and every day they should be employed in the execution of their respective offices,<sup>5</sup> and a year later it was voted that commissioners and inspectors should be "payed all the law will allow them."<sup>6</sup>

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1. Town Clerk's Records, A Book of Records, Containing an Accurate Enrollment of the Town of Royalton, April 7, 1818, p.4.

2. Ibid., p.6.

3. Ibid., p.21.

4. Ibid., p.22.

5. Ibid., p.106.

6. Ibid., p.123.

Because the earliest frontiers of Niagara County were established near Lake Ontario, in the vicinity of Lewiston, it was in that area that the earliest county school was held. Rev. Joshua Cooke, a veteran educator, wrote:

"In 1806, a school was taught by a Scotchman, named Watson, and, in 1807, continued by James Harrison, one of the attorneys already in Lewiston. Perhaps there were earlier ones elsewhere, but I doubt it. The school was kept in a log house, in the other end of which a family lived."

As every building in the town had been burned in the War of 1812, he explained that:

"All had to be rebuilt on the return of the inhabitants from their first flight....Their burned homes had no sooner been rebuilt than they turned their thoughts to a school and schoolhouse for their children. Before 1820, the old stone schoolhouse<sup>1</sup> was built, and for many years, was used as the one hope and pride of the people for their children. It was a stone building of two stories, about twenty-four feet square. For many years, the second story was used for religious services, conducted by such ministers of different denominations, as in the spirit of the Master, 'went about doing good' in that day of poverty and wilderness. In that old stone schoolhouse were laid the foundations of education for men who, in after days, were to be leaders in the community, and pioneers of settlement and education in the regions beyond."<sup>2</sup>

Accounts of new school buildings at later dates coincide with the clearing of the land as settlers moved eastward from Lewiston.

In the study of early county schools, we learn that:

"As far as is now known, the first school in the town of Wilson was taught evenings in 1817 by Luther Watson, for the benefit of adults. It was continued through the months of January and February in a dwelling about a mile south of the site of the village."

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1. (A few log schools had been built (in Lewiston), the first one in 1806. In this village, a stone school was erected and finished in 1816.)  
Niagara County, New York, vol. 1, p. 295.

2. James Atwater, "Schools of Niagara County", Souvenir History of Niagara County, p. 47.

The first schoolhouse was built of logs in 1819 on the Lake Road about a mile and a half east of Wilson village. Another log schoolhouse, the first in the village, was built in 1820."<sup>1</sup>

The log structures "were generally built by bees", or gatherings of such settlers as had children to be educated. Seats were benches made of slabs split from logs with legs inserted in auger holes at the corners. The desks, when there were any, were constructed after the same plan. There was no black-board, and the entire school apparatus consisted of a half-dozen well-seasoned switches and a substantial ruler, and no opportunity was neglected to make use of these appliances for the general advancement of the causes of education and good manners.<sup>2</sup>

Affairs of each district were managed by three trustees who were elected at annual meetings. They were entrusted with the entire charge of the schools, except that they could not impose tax unless voted by the legal voters of the district.

Subject to this restriction, they built schools, engaged teachers, levied taxes for incidental expenses, such as fuel and repairs, and the tuition and books of indigent pupils. They apportioned rate bills, based on daily attendance of pupils whose parents, or guardians, were deemed able to pay. Since the amount charged each pupil was based on the ratio of his attendance to the aggregate attendance of the whole school (except indigent pupils), it will be readily seen that a premium was offered for irregular attendance, and there were no truant officers to look after delinquents in those days.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Niagara County, New York, vol.1, p.295.
  2. 1821 History of Niagara County, New York, p. 97.
  3. Atwater, op. cit., p. 46.



In time, the log structures gave way to stone or brick buildings and, in the last quarter of the century, to wooden structures.

A "Volunteer Report on the condition of the schools in the First Commissioner District of Niagara County (Royalton)" appeared on page one of the Lockport Daily Journal and Courier on September 3, 1870.

It states that:

"District number four deserves praise for the elegant little house it has provided for school purposes. Of brick, with patent improved seats and a comfortable little woodhouse attached, it is all that could be desired."

"Orangeport number eleven, is one of the largest and most wealthy district<sup>s</sup> in the town, but their LITTLE, OLD, WORNOUT frame building is a sad commentary on public spirit. .... What is lacking in house is made up by the superior excellence of teachers, so is one of the best schools in the town."

"Number thirteen-Very poor stone house."

"Number twenty-five, Royalton Center, next to Middleport, is in point of wealth and number of pupils attending school, the largest district in the town. What shall I say then, in estimation of the fact this is a wealthy district with a superabundance of means and blessed with the most wretched apology of a house of any district within this jurisdiction? I consider it a crime against those little ones...but the multitudes of children in this district have been doomed for years to huddle together in this shanty behind the barn and receive what instruction it was possible for the teachers employed to impart to them, and it is a source of great astonishment what progress they have made against the discouragements they are compelled to contend with. Number twenty-five should have a house worth at least \$2500."<sup>1</sup>

Two years later, at least three new wooden schools were erected at Gasport, Orangeport, and Reynold's Basin.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Both number thirteen and number twenty-five built "new and comfortable houses during the past year"--Lockport Daily Journal, July 31, 1872, p. 1.

2. Ibid., July 22, 1872, p. 3.

Of the school at Reynold's Basin, it was later reported,

"The new school.....is finished..... It is thirty-six feet long by twenty-six feet wide, entryways and closets. It has a basement room under the whole of it, seven feet high for wood and other purposes. The house was built,.....on contract, for \$1,224. It is quite a neat and comfortable building but very much needs window blinds and a bell."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Lockport Daily Journal, August 2, 1872,p.3.



Deserted cobblestone school located on Akron Road, near Lockport.



Brick school, originally built in 1863, located on Route 104, at Ridgeway, and now used as a residence.



One of the few deserted wooden schools left in the area, located on the Lewiston Road at Gilbert's Corners.

## CHAPTER II

### LESSONS UNDER THE ROD

In 1838, common schools were, with few exceptions, the only available means of education open to the masses of the people. Instruction in these schools was confined exclusively to the "3 Rs" and, in some cases, English,<sup>1</sup> grammar and geography.

"The first textbooks were few and scarcely up to the present standard. At first, any book, be it Bible or almanac, was admissible as a reader, and there was little uniformity in the other books. Among those used most must be mentioned Noah Webster's Spelling Book, Daboll's Arithmetic, Morse's Geography, Murray's Grammar, and the English Reader. In some schools the United States Speller was used, the first reading lesson in which is as follows:

My son, do no evil  
Go not in the way of bad men.  
For bad men go to the pit.  
O, my son, run not in the way of sin!

The youthful readers were required to memorize such lessons, and they, no doubt, impressed truths that had a lasting influence on their lives and characters. Attempts were made to inculcate gentlemanly deportment and respect for the aged, and many pupils on their way to and from school would politely raise their hats on meeting strangers. It is to be regretted that Young America to-day appears to be less susceptible to such instruction, or that it is not so prominent a feature in the public schools of the present time." (1902)<sup>2</sup>

Apparently, it was not until the last quarter of the century that much attention was given to making subject matter interesting and appealing to the pupil. The following newspaper article, entitled "History in our Common Schools", which appeared in 1877, indicates an apparent attempt to make the study of history more vital and popular:

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1. Atwater, op. cit., p. 46
  2. 1821 History of Niagara County, New York, p. 97

"Love of country ought to burn in every breast with a steady and reliable flame. It ought to be, and is to a great extent, the mother element of our national life. It would be stronger, steadier, more reliable, if every citizen understood our institutions, their origin, development, progress and promises. This understanding can be had by those alone who study the history of the country from its discovery to the present time, who gather the lesson of its greatness from the successive steps the fathers made toward liberty and independence until they gained the realization of their hopes in a free land and a self-governed people.

Systematic study of the history of the United States is not generally pursued in the common schools, although something to answer the form of historical investigation is there attempted. The subject has become distasteful in late years, not because it lacks interest, not because its importance is underrated, but because historical textbooks do not convey the facts of history in attractive form. The story of our national travail and birth is one of the most absorbing relations in all history, when properly presented. When shorn of its illustrative incidents, legitimate deductions and grand climax, it is tame and dry as mere chronological record. Ordinarily, textbooks of history cut the grand and soul-thrilling record down to its dry chronological features and expect it to excite the enthusiasm of youth!

A change of textbooks in many branches will be made under the law passed by the last Legislature relating to this subject.....

Our attention has recently been called to a History of the United States, for the use of schools, by Prof. J. C. Ridpath, which is not only the best we have seen, but embraces features of rare value, never before incorporated into any history. It is written in a style of great elegance, but simple and easy of comprehension, systematically arranged in a connected narrative, unbiased and without political or sectarian prejudice, elegantly and intelligently illustrated with chronological charts, progressive maps, topographical diagrams, portraits and cuts, fresh, philosophical and readable. It is as much unlike an ordinary school history as the beautiful periods of Irving are unlike the turgid nonsense of Tupper; and it so adroitly weaves the inspiring story of our country into the web and woof of its material facts as to impress the lessons of history upon the mind with indellible force.

A change to this book has already been effected in more than twelve hundred schools in the state of New York, and we are clear in the opinion that its general adoption will prove both grateful and beneficial to attendants of our common schools everywhere."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Lockport Daily Union, September 24, 1877, p.3.

## CHAPTER III

### SCHOOL MA'AMS AND MASTERS

The earliest schools were usually open about three or four months in summer and three months in winter. The summer terms were ordinarily taught by women, but the winter schools, which were attended by many large boys, were always conducted by men teachers. Some of the wealthier districts employed men both winter and summer, seeming to prefer their teaching.

"In those days the question was not, 'Has the teacher a good education?', but 'Is he stout? Has he good government?' It was a frequent practice in some districts to smoke out the teacher and break up the school. Their attempts in this direction were successful for several successive years, and then, when the district had won a bad name and came to be shunned by the generality of pedagogues, a stranger with well-developed governing powers would happen along, open a school and speedily reduce the belligerent 'big boys' to a condition of subjection, and prompt, if not cheerful obedience, thus setting the ball of education rolling on."<sup>1</sup>

In an effort to secure capable teachers, the following notice appeared in an 1833 newspaper:

"Several young men of sufficient learning, abilities, etc. and who have had some experience in school keeping, will probably find employment as teachers of common schools in our town the ensuing winter and, as the citizens of Royalton have voted to raise ALL the money which the state allows for the support of the common schools - to wit, double the amount we received from the state treasury, they will probably receive ready pay when this service shall be completed. We give this notice in hopes of calling the attention of young men of superior talents and who are in all respects well qualified to teach children and youth all the necessary branches of education."<sup>2</sup>

"The teachers were often strangers who were traveling through the country and who paused to replenish their purses or gain a few months of recreation in school-

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1. 1821-History of Niagara County, p.97.  
2. Commissioners and Inspectors of Common Schools, Royalton, September 28, 1833, The Courier of Lockport, New York, October 2, 1833.

teaching. Sometimes they were foreigners, often they were intemperate and they were all addicted to the use of the rod."<sup>1</sup>

One local correspondent for the daily newspaper related:

"Mr. F. Swift, who teaches the district school at Johnson's Creek, has been arrested and held to bail for punishing a scholar in his school for whispering. The child was punished with a ferule on his hand and it is said that it swelled to an enormous size, and has in some way 'affected the arm'."<sup>2</sup>

Also in the Gasport items in 1888,

"Our village schoolmaster has a black eye. He <sup>3</sup>  
better stop boxing and exert his strength on the kids."

Miss Belle Davison, of Royalton, recalls that on one occasion a visitor came to school and had some words with Alan Penly, who was the schoolmaster at the time. When one pupil suggested, "Let's lick the teacher," another replied, "All hell couldn't lick him."

Mr. Fred Hagadorn, in speaking of Mr. Penly as "one of the best teachers", remembers the day when one boy hit another as he walked past his seat. Mr. Penly reached for the beech stick which was kept on top of the hat rack and cracked it around the legs of the offender, leaving marks or ridges as evidence of the beating. The incident "broke up the school" and a lawsuit followed. However, it was "thrown out of court." Part of the pupils stayed in the school while others were sent to a private school which was conducted by a woman teacher. In the latter case, Mr. Hagadorn says that not much learning took place as the pupils were allowed to "fool around."

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1. 1821-History of Niagara County, New York, p. 97.
  2. Lockport Daily Journal, December 31, 1877, p. 4.
  3. Middleport Herald, March 29, 1888.

Mr. Frank Sheldon recalls that he used to climb up on the hat rack in a school he attended to get out of the way of some of the "bloody fights" which took place among the big boys, some of them nineteen or twenty years old.

Many of the pioneer teachers were ingenious in the contrivance of original methods of punishment. From their novelty and terrors, they were by no means an ineoperative agency in maintaining the authority which was regarded as so essential to the well-being of the school. Some of these inventive characters flourished in a certain district at a day after the invention of the box stove. The schoolmaster conceived the brilliant idea of placing a brick on top of the stove over a brisk fire and making delinquents walk around the stove, one behind the other, and turn over the rapidly heating brick once during each circuit. This was kept up until their blistered fingers "goaded them into subjection".<sup>1</sup>

That all teachers were not so successful in discipline was noted by Mrs. Cora Brigham, now ninety-six years old. She recalls one very "odd" man teacher who used to wait for a certain big girl to arrive before ringing the school bell. Some of the pupils expressed their views in the following poem which appeared on the blackboard one day:

O, Lord of love, look from above  
Upon our school committee.  
They've hired a fool to teach our school  
And he comes from Boston City.

Mrs. Brigham commented that they fooled around and did not learn much that term.

Although discipline was considered a prime qualification for common school teachers, the other duties to be performed were numerous. James Atwater, a veteran schoolmaster who taught for twenty years in the county schools and was for twelve years superintendent of the schools of Lockport, enumerated some of the responsibilities which early teachers had to assume. They were obliged to sweep

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1. 1821- History of Niagara County, New York, p. 98.



the floor, build the fires (being lucky if they did not have to saw the wood), write the copies, make and mend the quill pens (the only ones in use), and assist the trustees in making out the taxes and rate bills. He recalled that, while teaching in a large district in the Town of Royalton in the winter of 1839-1840, he had to hear a large grammar class after school hours, (his pupils numbered sixty to seventy daily, of all grades from the alphabet to English grammar) go, in one instance, two and a half miles to board, entertain the family in the evening, and have breakfast early enough in the morning to get back two and half miles before it was light enough to see, to write copies.

For this demanding schedule, men teachers in the county were paid from thirteen to eighteen dollars per month while women received from one dollar and fifty cents to two dollars per week. Both were boarded free around the district. This practice was continued, in most instances, until the adoption of the free school law in 1869. Districts usually covered a considerable area and "boarding round" was sometimes a little burdensome.

"But this practice had its bright sides, also. As a rule, the teacher lived on the 'fat of the land' and not unusually he was asked to defer his visit until the annual 'killing.' He was brought into close contact with the parents and patrons of the school, which was a great help to him. It was a good system for those early times, but it has passed away, never to return."<sup>1</sup>

In October, 1877, county teachers convened for one week at a Lutheran Church in Lockport for "lectures and discussion of mutual problems." It was also noted that examinations for teachers' certificates would be held during the week.<sup>2</sup>

The first lecture was a very interesting discourse on Physical Culture.

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1. Atwater, op. cit., p. 46.

2. Notice appeared in Lockport Daily Union, September 24, 1877, p. 3.

The professor "dwelt at length on the digestive functions and showed how easily an elementary lesson in Physiology could be presented to children."

A second speaker gave a lesson on the "Development of Form." "His definitions of lines, angles, circles, and points were so simple that a child would readily grasp the idea."

In a third lecture, teachers were advised that a text book on morals should be studied in "our" schools

".....as it includes all the political economy and the science of civil government. It includes also the highest rule of all justice, the Golden Rule, to do to others as we would that others should do to us...As to instruction and text books on religion, those should be left to Sunday Schools and Churches and not be brought into the public schools."

A question box was a feature of the convention whereby teachers could bring all their difficulties for discussion and interchange of views. The following questions and suggested solutions were published in the local newspaper as the daily sessions were reviewed:

QUESTION: "How shall we hold the attention of pupils?"

ANSWER: "A teacher must be thoroughly prepared upon a subject before presenting it to the pupil in order to interest him."<sup>1</sup>

QUESTION: "What shall be done with pupils who refuse to leave school for disobeying rules?"

ANSWER: "Teachers should be careful and not make unreasonable rules; but if suspension is necessary, apply to the trustees or the proper authorities for aid."

QUESTION: "How should a teacher employ his time out of school?"

ANSWER: "Mr. Snyder being young and social thought a teacher should not employ his time better than by visiting the parents of his pupils and making himself generally agreeable in the neighborhood. Mr. Brown was strongly in favor of this, remembering the time when he was single and handsome."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Lockport Daily Union, October 2, 1877, p. 3.
  2. Ibid., October 9, 1877, p. 4.

Certainly, in those days, when the school was such an important focal point in the community, the devoted teachers were regarded with much devotion and high esteem. The following tribute which appeared in a newspaper near the close of the century is typical of many which were published 'In Memoriam':

### RESOLUTIONS.

#### Death of Miss Ella M Robinson

Whereas, We have been sadly stricken in the Provisional removal by death of Miss Ella Robinson from her place in the school-room, which she so ably and faithfully filled as our teacher; therefore,

*Resolved*, That we herein express our deep feelings of sadness, and yet while we mourn our loss are consoled in the thought, and assurance, that our loss is her eternal gain.

*Resolved*, That mindful of her beautiful Christian character and lady-like bearing in the discharge of her duties in the school-room and her impartial interest in our welfare as scholars, we shall seek under the abiding influence of her life and teachings to turn to useful account that which she impressed on our youthful hearts and minds.

*Resolved*, That while we feel the loss most deeply we are not unmindful of those with whom she was more intimately connected in family relation and from which she was taken so suddenly and unexpectedly and in their sad affliction we, as the scholars of her last school experience on earth tender to them this tribute of our high respect to her memory as the expression of our heart-felt sympathy with them in their affliction.

Mary M. Herzog,  
E. Evelyn Callan,  
G. Louis Callan,  
George Truax,  
Elmer Zachariah,  
Ellis E. Zachariah,  
Edward G. Bulmore,  
Richard Gladon,  
Rusman H. Lawrance,  
Anna Thoma,  
Eva B. Earnest,  
Stella Jones,  
Art Jones;

Raymond Jones,  
Nettie Stebbins,  
Lawrence O'Connor,  
Mabel E. Lawrance,  
Marion H. Lawrance,  
Howard H. Ranney,  
Roy F. Wisterman,  
Chas. A. Dunkelberger,  
Frank E. Van Buren,  
Clarence B. Ward,  
Clayton J. Ward,  
Elmer P. Harpst,  
Sophia L. Harpst

CHAPTER IV  
PLEASANT MEMORIES

In reminiscing about school days in the last century, many of our senior citizens remember the great fun and jolly times they enjoyed.

Mrs. Sawyer and her sister, Laura, recall playing "Andy, Andy, Over" and "Pom, Pom, Pull-away" at the Slayton Settlement Road School near Gasport. They remember the winter mornings when "Father" took them to school in the sleigh. They were clad in "too many clothes" which included long underwear, hand-knitted black or red stockings, high buttoned-up shoes, overshoes, leggings, hand-knitted hoods and hand-made coats. Their dresses were made from wool and were covered by big gingham aprons made with sleeves and buttoned up the back. They were "really very pretty aprons" and were machine sewn since "Grandma Campbell had the first sewing machine in Niagara County."

The sisters recall that "Mother used to pack the nicest lunches." In their dinner pails they would find beans, sandwiches, pie, fried cakes("Never were any like Mother's!"), and cheese. The latter was a very common food in the vicinity because of the Reynales Basin cheese factory nearby.<sup>1</sup>

Sleigh rides and spelling bees between schools provided much merriment. Miss Belle Davison recalls the time she was going to "leave off head" in a spelling bee. When the teacher pronounced the word "knob" , a boy she considered to be her friend whispered "g-n-o-b" and caused her to go to the foot of the class.

Snow fights proved to be great fun for Mr. Fred Hagadorn's classmates. When the big boys would try to put "one cordy little cuss" into a hole in the snow banks as "high as this room" , Old H.O. (Sibley)<sup>2</sup>, the teacher, would stand and

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1. Detailed report of this cheese factory appeared in Lockport Daily Journal , on January 6, 1874.

2. Much more of Mr. Sibley's story is given on pages to follow.

laugh at the kids.

It was at the country schoolhouse that the entire community gathered on many occasions. At the closing exercises of one winter term

".....the school gave a fine exhibition in the evening. The schoolhouse was crowded and all said that it was an exceedingly fine performance. Mr. Brooks has proved himself a very competent teacher. He will certainly be expected to teach the same school next winter as this district is determined to have only first class teachers."<sup>1</sup>

The school picnic was another gay occasion. A notice in the Lockport Daily Journal and Courier on August 17, 1861 relates that

"A very pleasant school picnic came off yesterday in Hall's Woods, a little north of Gasport. The Gasport school,....., the Mabee school, ..... and the Reynales Basin school, ..... with many friends, assembled in a pleasant grove at an early hour in the afternoon to enjoy a social get-together in a hall of nature's own workmanship. There was indeed a group of cheerful and happy faces. After a happy address from the Rev. J.L.Dox, of Lockport, they partook of a bountiful collation and then made the woods echo with merry games."

A popular entertainment for the young people was the community singing school. Such a group was organized at Dysinger's Corners in the winter of 1886, and a report in the Middleport Herald on December twenty-third of that year stated that it was largely attended and very interesting. Sufficient money had been raised, by the committee having the matter in charge, for a term of twenty lessons. It was an "old-fashioned singing school, no instrument being used, and the voice of the conductor being the only guide." It was "an excellent opportunity for our young people to learn the art and science of music. Such knowledge is a great desideratum. Music is an accomplishment all the young should seek to acquire."

It was, no doubt, such happy times as those which have been related that

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1. Niagara Journal, of Middleport, April 7, 1886.

inspired the fond memories mentioned in the poem which follows: <sup>1</sup>

1897

# NIAGARA COUNTY NEWS.

## MY SCHOOLMATES.

Dedicated to the Bunker Hill School of  
Royalton, N. Y.

A thought comes often to me of childhood's home  
so dear—  
Of the dark-winged swallows chattering round  
the barn so near;  
And many pleasant fancies of the homestead in  
the orchard by the hill,  
And the cricket's evening song, and the robin's  
early morning trill;  
With tender loving memories of those friends I  
used to know;  
Where the ever climbing grapevines and elder-  
berries grow.

What has become of those who were with me on  
Bunker Hill?  
And where are the other friends with whom I  
laughed at will?  
And what's become of Sara E. and her brothers  
and sister Ell?  
And of Nathan and Thout, who went to school  
on Bunker for a spell?  
They were the boys and they the girls who  
shared my youthful play;  
They do not answer to my call; my school-  
mates, where are they?

What has become of Jesse and his brothers and  
little sisters too,  
Who lived next door to where I lived so many  
years ago?  
I'd like to see the Kohler boys, and Webster,  
Philo and Monroe,  
Who all were in my class, and very many more  
I know:  
And Sofa, Mary, Ella and Phebe I cannot call  
them all,  
But I know they'd answer—could they only hear  
my call!

I'd like to see them all, the boys and girls of long  
ago,  
And talk about the times we had just as we used  
to do;  
And those—I shall not name them—Oh! could I  
see each happy face,  
And hear each gentle voice in this far distant  
western place.

They, like the flowers and hopes of springtime  
quickly passed away  
Where loving friends are reunited to shine in  
everlasting day.

Oh! homestead in the orchard! have you seen  
those girls and boys?  
That in that long ago were full of fun and filled  
the air with noise,  
Oh woods and vales, ponds and lanes, and mead-  
ows! do you know  
Where I shall find my youthful friends of very  
many years ago?  
I'm getting lonely and weary, in this distance  
long and far;  
I'm thinking of my schoolmates—I wonder  
where they are!  
E. A. B. MAYNARD, IOWA.

1. Clipping found in family Bible belonging to this writer's grandparents.

## CHAPTER V

### FOR HIGHER LEARNINGS - - THE ACADEMIES

By 1824, the eagerness for education beyond the common school prompted the building of the first academies. One of these, known as the Lewiston Academy, was the wonder of those days and, on completion, it was incorporated on April 17, 1828.<sup>1</sup> This construction required great personal sacrifice and consisted of four stories. Its dimensions were sixty by forty feet and it was fifty feet in height. The fourth story was put on and used by the Masonic Fraternity for lodge purposes.<sup>2</sup>

In 1830, a man from Dartmouth College came to take charge of the academy. Jacob Hook Quinby was an important figure in shaping events for education in the county.

"To the thorough cultivation of a Dartmouth graduate, he united a personal magnetism that was, for all scholars under him, an inspiration and a charm. His very smile was an inspiration, and his verbal approval was a prize to study for. To have a defective recitation to him seemed almost a crime."

"To this old stone school, pupils came from far and near, many from Lockport, Buffalo and Canada. For here, all at once, before the bright boys and girls of ten to seventeen years of age, lay a new untrodden field- Algebra, Geometry, History, Chemistry, Natural Philosophy, and even Latin!"<sup>3</sup>

In 1845, another Niagara County academy was erected and named for a prominent citizen who headed the building fund list with five hundred dollars. The Wilson Collegiate Institute was a two-story building of Lake Ontario cobblestone. As was the case in all the early academies, the school was sustained

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1. Edward T, Williams., Niagara County, New York, vol.1, p.306  
2. Atwater, op.cit., p.47  
3. Ibid



Lewiston Academy, once a landmark along the border, has since been deserted and torn down. Lewiston is the oldest village in the county.

( This imposing structure stood as a monument of the past, visible for miles around, long after it was abandoned. )



by tuition from the students for nearly a quarter of a century. When the revenue from this source was insufficient, in 1869, four adjoining school districts were consolidated and it became the Wilson Union School. At the end of the century, the cobblestones that had housed the Wilson Collegiate Institute gave way to brick, and it was now called the Wilson High School. Thus, this one institution has correctly pictured the evolution of the educational institutions in Niagara County - first, the Academy, second, the Union School, and finally, the High School.<sup>1</sup>

From its beginnings, the Wilson Academy was very popular. It attracted students from Lockport, and other important towns and villages of the county, as well as many from other counties and other states. Lewiston's popularity faded as Wilson Academy became the "proper thing": "the beautiful shaded streets of the village were so traversed by students from far and near, that they seemed like 'Academic Groves', and Wilson took on the air of a college town."<sup>2</sup>

The growth of academies spread throughout the county and state as had the common schools before them. Locally, in the town of Royalton, two such institutions were prominent. Of these, Royalton Centre Academy was earlier. An advertisement in the Niagara Democrat of September 22, 1837, states that it was:

"... to open the first Monday in October under the direction of competent and experienced teachers.

The situation selected is about eight miles east of the village of Lockport on the stage road to Batavia and, for retirement, sulubrity, and pleasantness, is surpassed by few in the county.

The course of instruction will comprise the elementary and higher branches of a thorough English and classical education so as to fit the pupil for admission into college, for the study of a profession or for business. Arrangements have been made with private families in the vicinity for boarding pupils where every attention will be paid health and comfort."

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1. Williams, op. cit. p.307.

2. Atwater, op. cit. p.18.

TERMS: For instruction, \$4 per quarter. Year is divided into two terms of twenty-three weeks each and commencing the first day of October and first day of May. An address will be delivered on Saturday preceding commencement at 1:00 P.M. By order of the trustees."

During the week following this announcement, the same newspaper noted that:

".....a neat brick academy has been .....completed..... at..... Royalton Centre..... The enterprise is that of a small neighborhood of farmers, principally, and it tells well for their public spirit in the cause of education. They have done more than Lockport has done with its five thousand inhabitants. And our village stands reprovved by our Royalton neighbors....."<sup>1</sup>

Belva Bennett (Mc Nall-Lockwood ), who became the first woman admitted to practice law before the United States Supreme Court, and later, the first woman to receive votes for the presidency, entered this institution at the age of fourteen. Of this, she once said, "I always wanted an education, even when a girl. When I was fourteen I had enough money to attend the Royalton Academy a year. There were no free schools then."<sup>2</sup>

About 1857, Belva, (then Mrs. McNall), having attended Syracuse University, returned to her home in Royalton and applied for a job at the academy. Being offered only one-half the salary paid to men teachers, she indignantly declined the job and vowed to devote the rest of her life to the cause of Woman's Rights.<sup>3</sup>

In 1850, a stock company was formed, and the second local academy was built at Gasport. All the academic subjects were taught and the average attendance was seventy. Belva McNall continued her education here in the fall of 1853.<sup>4</sup>

To attract students in 1859, the Lockport Journal and Courier printed this advertisement on August 26:

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1. Niagara Democrat, September 29, 1837
  2. Julia Winner, "Belva Lockwood- 125 Anniversary of Her Birth", in Lockport Union-Sun and Journal, October 24, 1955.
  3. Clarence O. Lewis, in Lockport Union-Sun and Journal, March 27, 1957.
  4. Maynard, op.cit.



THE GASPORT ACADEMY

It was abandoned about 1865, and is now used as a residence.

"This institution is, at present, in a flourishing state of prosperity and its principal....has spared no efforts to render it worthy of the confidence of those parents who desire to give their children a thorough academic education. The advantages to be gained at this school deserve consideration. Send for a circular."

The closing exercises of that fall term occupied an afternoon and evening. The afternoon session consisted of declamations, music, and reading of compositions. In the evening a debate, "which displayed considerable good judgement", was conducted by the members of the Philomathian Society. A lecture followed.<sup>1</sup>

The Niagara County Historical Society has a handbill which describes the attractions of the Gasport Academical School as of August 1864, with Mr. and Mrs. O. E. Ripley as principals. It contains the following information:

"The operations of this institution will be conducted in the Academy, which is a commodious and comfortable building, commencing Monday, August 15, 1864. Tuition will be from \$5.00 to \$7.00 according to the class of studies pursued. Latin and Elementary Drawing included. French, Italian, and German, the usual extra charges. Music-piano or guitar, \$10.00. Use of instrument for practice \$2.00. For Embroidery, Oil Painting, Wax Fruit, Flowers and Mono-Chromatic Painting there will be an extra charge. The Musical Department will be under the direction of a thorough and accomplished teacher. All bills payable at the middle of each quarter."

Pupils were to be found rooms and board on the village, and the remarks on the handbill conclude with this advice: "...the Principals, whose object will be to secure to pupils committed to their care, such moral and intellectual culture as shall be adapted to aid in fitting them for this life, and for the next"<sup>2</sup>

It is a seventeen-year old boy's handwritten story of that particular fall term at the Gasport Academy which is related, in part, in the chapter which follows.

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1. Niagara Democrat of Lockport, December 1, 1859.
  2. Julia Winner, Yesterday in Royalton, p. 28.

## CHAPTER VI

### A HISTORY

OF THE FALL TERM OF GASPORT ACADEMY IN THE YEAR 1864

by

Frank J.V.Sibley

#### Preface

".....I concluded that if I would know my feelings when I was in Gasport school, if I would look back after five, ten or twenty years, and know the real,..... I must now, while all was fresh in my mind, write a History of the scenes which I witnessed there. Hence, I have compiled this work. If it should ever fall into the hands of anyone else beside myself, I hope they will not criticize too severely the style of writing or the course which I pursued as detailed in these pages, remembering that it was all transacted and written during my seventeenth year. But if you do criticize, you must accord me the praise of being an honest Historian, for, in no case, have I endeavored to conceal or palliate my own faults or misdoings.

#### Introduction

'Twas a glorious afternoon in the summer of the year 1864. The sun shone with unwonted brilliancy, and in the azure blue of Heaven's ethereal dome not a cloud floated to mar its unlimited transparency. A soft breeze slightly cooled the hot summer air, making it very pleasant to walk along the roads which were as smooth as the constant wave of many wheels during the long, dry weeks which had passed - could make them. The sheaves of ripened grain standing in the fields by the wayside told of the luxuriant harvests and the orchards loaded with their tempting fruit filled the mind with thoughts of fire-side joys in the cold winter nights. These were the prospects which spread out before me as I prepared for the journey to Gasport on a visit to the school which I designed to attend for one or more terms. The distance between my home at McNalls Corners and the Institution to which I was going was two miles but as I was in the habit of walking, I soon accomplished it and found myself at the gate of the famous Academy. Once famous-- but alas! -- how fallen!

The building stood with its 'gable end' towards the road, which ran north and south, so that the edifice was longest from east to west. The entrance was upon the west end. Just within the door was a small hall, from which in a southerly direction ascended the stairs. Off this hall were closets, one north and the other on the south, which were repositories of extra garments, dinner baskets etc. The north one was devoted to the use of the ladies; the other to the gentlemen. At the head, the stairs turned east, and there was another small hall containing one window, through which you must pass by a northerly course to the stairway leading to the next story..... the upper rooms were occupied by ladies attending the school.

Across, or on the east side of the hall,.....is the door to the school-room..... The desks are arranged so as to face this door which is in the corner, leaving room for a platform upon which teachers stand and on which scholars stand when using the 'blackboard' which runs along the whole side of the room save the two doors..... I have been thus particular in my description in order that the reader may be fully able to understand the scenes narrated in these pages.....

As I reached the landing, the Principal espied me and came to the door. ....He shook hands with me and invited me into the schoolroom. I introduced myself and explained the object of my visit. Mr. Ripley (for that was the name of the Principal) showed me a seat and handed me the afternoon paper with which to busy myself while he finished hearing a recitation.

While he was thus engaged I will describe his general characteristics. He was about five feet ten inches in height, large frame, slight stoop to his shoulders, which was habitual, and had a way of holding his head erect, which, contrasted with the stoop of his shoulders was ludicrous and gave him the appearance of one who is perpetually listening to overhear what others are saying. His features were somewhat wrinkled, there was a tame expression of the eye, and the perceptive faculties were apparently not very fully developed--all told of a weak intellect, which, as usual with that class, are capable only of deep-rooted prejudices that reason or sense cannot remove....At the same time I took opportunity to look around the room and see who were there. I found but one boy, but a large number of girls, as many as twenty-five....Mrs. Ripley (the wife of the principal) taught in the school, hearing most of the ladies in their classes, so that Mr. Ripley's time was not entirely occupied and, having attended his class, he returned to me and we held a long conversation together. I told him that I desired to study Algebra, Geometry, and Latin. He informed me that Mrs. Ripley would instruct me in Latin, while he himself would attend to my mathematics....

We began conversing upon experiences when I had attended school at Gasport two years before. During our conversation on this subject, Mr. Ripley casually remarked that he had heard....that I had progressed farther than Mr. Barker (who was the teacher) was himself versed. Afterwards, when I reverted to this point, I thought I had obtained the key to all Mr. Ripley's ill-treatment of me; for I reasoned thus: Teachers naturally feel sympathy for each other: (knowing the trials of the teacher's life)....When school was out I told Mr. Ripley that I should commence my attendance on the ensuing Monday.

## Chapter 1st

### In School

Monday morning, on which I intended to commence school, came and with it a heavy rain shower or storm, the first in many weeks.... I had to..... catch a horse from the lot to go to Gasport. I would not have been to the trouble of hitching up a horse, had I not wanted to carry my books, for the horses were nearly a mile away. Father drove me down in order to take the buggy back....

Reaching Gasport, I at once took my books and went up stairs....I placed my dinner basket and overcoat in our closet and proceeded to the schoolroom, and took a seat about midway down the aisle....Mr. Ripley came and conversed at every interval between recitations. He wanted me to take book-keeping or chemistry, but I told him that in these I was thoroughly educated. George Renwee came in....and took a seat beside me. Before long Mr. Ripley came over to our side of the house to see about our Latin. George manifested a desire to read 'Virgil' in which the teacher seemed willing to oblige him, but I objected, as I knew my own nescience, and knew too, that Mr. Renwee was not as far advanced as I was. So it was decided that we should read in the 'reader'.

At last noon came. A large number of scholars lived at such distances from the school that they....brought their dinners to school. All partook

of their meal in the schoolroom and as we were sitting there, I noticed that one of the girls manifested a particular desire to become acquainted with me. ....I made some answer but so delicately was it worded that I conceived I could give offence to no one. of the ladies of the school (for I made up my mind to treat them all so that they could not speak ill of me) .... My reason being based on the argument--'Too much attention to one is apt to disgust others!'

.....Tuesday morning Mr. Ripley examined George and me in Algebra..... George could answer no question asked of him while I answered both those propounded to him and me also. We commenced at the beginning and looked over as far as Simple Equations....After this, Mr. Ripley spoke to me of Geometry, and I told him I had nearly completed the study but would like to review; where I would commence I would decide the next morning if it made no difference to him. He replied that....he hoped I would commence at the first point which I did not thoroughly understand. I laughingly said, "If not before that I shall not, perhaps, need to commence at all." "Very well," he answered smilingly, "act on your own judgment"....

Wednesday morning, our examination in Algebra was continued. George became puzzled and had to stop at 'Equations containing two or more unknown quantities.' I went along easily enough,....but when I arrived in the examination at the chapter of 'Robinson's University Algebra', headed 'Pure Equations', I told Mr. Ripley that I thought I had better commence here so as to be sure of what I went over....My studies were all above the rest of the school, there being only a class in Algebra (a primary work) commencing, and three girls in Physiology. Miss Albright studies Natural Philosophy. These were the highest studies. Miss Shippen studied French and several took music lessons of a Miss Perkins who came down from Lockport twice or three times a week.

....hearing that Miss Albright could easily borrow for me the works of Thomas Paine, I asked her to do so....I took opportunity to read in these books and liked the course of Mr. Paine during Our Revolution as detailed in those pages. These works did not embrace 'The Age of Reason' which is so much condemned by all good people. I desired to obtain this, also, even though I could not endorse its sentiments, yet I, having heard so much of it, wished to know its real character....

This afternoon the ladies had a paper which was entitled 'The Acorn'. I had written an article....which was headed 'Our Privileges'....Mr. Ripley, after reading the paper, called on George to declaim, to which he responded with a discourse on the difference between the glory of Scott and Wellington. Next I was called upon and favored them with 'Sparticus to the Gladiators'.

....During the week, I had importuned Mr. Ripley to allow us (the boys) to have a paper. He had consented, after having urged that he thought we should be unable to sustain it; and receiving this reply from me, 'If necessary, I, alone, can write a sufficient number of articles to sustain it'. His parting shaft was, 'If it is sustained, you'll have to do that.' The point....settled the boys chose me for their Editor....It was decided to call our paper 'The Oak.'

## Chapter 2nd

### The Rest of the Events of a Fortnight

....In my own class in Geometry (in which I was alone), I made excellent progress, taking ten or twelve Propositions to a lesson and moving right along.

..... During the week Mr. Ripley went to Lockport and I took occasion to send for a Logic and Rhetoric as I designed to pursue these studies. He purchased for me those written by 'Choppee' as they were the text-books commonly used.

..... I liked Fayette Shippen very well for she was always so light-hearted and joyous; but then nothing about her betokened any great liking for my society and so I concluded not to foster the little germs of friendship that were springing up for her.

I liked Hattie very well for she seemed so good and kindly disposed towards me, yet she possessed not enough beauty and learning for my fastidious taste. Celia, although not handsome, was intelligent, and could appreciate intellectual worth. She used pretty good language and at this point I measured people somewhat by their conversational powers. In fact, I grew to like Celia quite well. She seemed to be informed on all the topics of general interest which were moving the people and, moreover, her political views coincided with mine, and I was mad on politics in 1864.

### Chapter 3rd

#### New Scholars

The next Monday we had an addition to our school. My cousin, H.O. Sibley, who lived at Royalton Center, two miles east of my residence on the Lewiston Road, was one. He took the notion into his head that he could walk four miles to school without seriously discommoding himself.....

Henry was a tall and rather slim young man, not differing in physical construction from any other tall person, yet in the mental nature he was essentially an oddity. There was no subject on which he could not say something, and say it well. He was versed in all History and Literature; indeed he had read all the works of the great poets and some he could repeat 'ab initio ad finem'

The girls ..... seemed to hold in their hearts a sort of awe for Henry which was caused by his excessive loquaciousness.....

During this week I was busy with my paper, at every opportunity..... Celia had written a composition for my paper which I regarded as very good for I had to make but few 'finishing touches' to make it quite presentable. Henry wrote some for me, and George gave me a composition which I was obliged to spend more time in arranging than I should have required to have written two of equal length. This was the only assistance which I had in my paper. I wrote all the rest and also one for the 'Acorn' entitled 'The Temple'.....

Friday afternoon came in the course of events. The 'Acorn' was read and I was then called upon to read the 'Oak'. The ladies up to this time read their compositions from the originals. I set them an example by copying mine upon a quire of Congress letter paper tied with blue ribbon.. The ladies were behind in the excellence of their paper although there were twenty of them and only two of us.

### Chapter 4th

#### Monotonous Weeks

The next weeks the usual studies occupied our minds..... Henry and I studied our lessons in Latin together. The order of our recitations was thus; first in the morning Algebra occupying about an hour. All of us recited at the same time but each was considered as a separate class..... Henry and I recited in



Logic; we were using two works...; we compared them and learned as much as we could from each others books in addition to what our own contained..... In Geometry, I went along with greater rapidity than could be expected even of one reviewing, until I arrived at the Fifth Book and then I had to check my pace some although I didn't allow anyone to suppose that it was the first time I had been over it, for I still moved rapidly.

In Algebra, I ..... kept on with the same speed..... through the book, without the assistance from the teacher or any one else. I will explain this-

In the beginning ....., I began to have some suspicions of the capabilities of Mr. Ripley as a teacher, for this reason: whenever George asked a question on any point he would ask me to answer it and explain the difficult passages....

2ndly: After I left that class, the manner in which Mr. R- taught George was still more suspicious.... He proceeded slowly, to read the demonstration lines and read them over again, never at any time saying one single word in explanation and George all the time puzzled.

3rdly: In his other classes (arithmetic) the boys would find examples which they would be unable to solve.... He would study on them awhile and then say 'I'll do it for you pretty soon. I haven't time now', and leave them. They came to me after the Principal had left them. I usually did them readily, and always did them.....

4thly: He was hearing George explain an example in Algebra.... Now anyone at all acquainted with Algebra would have seen the fallacy (of George's solution); on the contrary, he said to George, 'All right', and it passed unnoticed.

This, the last and crowning proof, entirely removed any sparks of confidence which still remained..... So when I came to those parts of Algebra of which I knew nothing, I moved on as if it was as familiar to me as the alphabet. I would set down the statement of my example, then write out immense numbers of figures, sometimes covering more than half of the blackboard written very fine. I would add, subtract, multiply, divide, extract roots, and raise to powers, in wild profusion. Having finished, I would take a 'pointer' and invent a very smooth flowing demonstration occupying fifteen or twenty minutes, always arriving at a correct answer which I had in my head from the beginning.....

For quite a time, I had a large amount of confidence in Mrs. Ripley but ..... my suspicions were aroused in Latin class..... Occasionally, I did not have time to translate the whole of my lesson. In these cases I read the whole as though I had studied it. Even then, she made no comment except 'Very well!' ..... After this, I began to read whole lessons without having even looked at them and I received the same comments from her.

Now that I had ascertained that the teachers were incompetent, I grew to be careless of rules and orders. Sometimes we all got to throwing notes in school and a great deal of time we were making fun with the girls across the seats..... So the minor acts passed into History.

## Chapter 5th

### Celia and I

..... I have mentioned before that I was becoming very much interested in Celia (not in love with her, for I never fell in love with anyone who was not handsome, and she was not, very) ..... Louise said all thought that Celia and I were in love..... I liked her because I liked Literature so well ..... But as for loving her ..... it is absurd. My life, my powers, my mind and soul are all



CHAPTER VII  
FROM FARM TO FAME

In the century which has passed since the Sibley cousins walked to the Gasport Academy, the family name seems to have disappeared from the area. However, the mention of H. O. (Henry) calls to attention numerous incidents in the memory of some of the residents.

The Sibley window in the Royalton Methodist Church bears the name of his father, Orrin, who according to the census records of 1860, was a farmer owning property valued at \$5000.

Mr. W. D. LaBar, of Rochester, a former resident of McNalls Corners, remembers him as "a very aristocratic looking man with a close shaven beard."

Mr. Hagadorn, eighty-five years of age, tells that H. O. was his first teacher, and was "real smart". He had Latin "and all those things down fine", and used to pick words apart and explain the Latin meanings. Once a book salesman, "who thought he was real smart", stopped at school. Mr. Sibley started talking Latin to him and called him a "glute" and it did not take the salesman long to leave.

Mr. Sibley exhibited a remarkable sense of humor and had nicknames for many of his scholars. One boy, named Andrew Good, became "General Andrew Jackson".

There was always a Friday afternoon story, of which Mr. Hagadorn recalls this favorite: "A man went into a mine or cave with a spool of string to prevent him from becoming lost. In the cave, he met all kinds of demons and monsters. When he came out, he grabbed a big sword and "BING!", he killed the demon." Mr. Hagadorn says, "He was a regular old Abe Lincoln."

After teaching in the common schools of Royalton<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sibley went to Syracuse University where he became a "big man". On one occasion when he returned to Royalton for a visit, he noticed the picture of one of the local citizens painted on the side of an "out-house". When he learned that Mr. Hagadorn had painted it, Mr. Sibley said, "Let me take that boy to Syracuse with me. He can tend fires and work for me and I'll send him to art school." When the boy's father replied, "No, he must go on the meat wagon", certainly a great opportunity was lost. Although Mr. Hagadorn's talent for art has lacked any formal training, he has pursued oil painting as a hobby for many years, and has completed numerous remarkable works.

Mr. Sibley entered Syracuse University with the class of 1889, and was elected the first librarian of the von Ranke Library at the University before graduation. He classified the library according to original methods.

Sibley was a composer of marked repute. Among his works were, "The Panther" and "The Pleasures of Education", a poem of two thousand lines.

In 1891-1893, Sibley pursued a post-graduate course at the University and was given his doctor's degree on the presentation of a Latin thesis.

Dean Frank Smalley said of him:

"Sibley was one of the brightest and most popular men that ever crossed the threshold of Syracuse University. In his work he was careful and accurate, and I have never seen a more brilliant mind than his. His learning was prodigious in languages and in English he was exceptionally bright. The Faculty all admired him and he was admired by his classmates. It was because of his linguistic ability that he was elected librarian of the University. His knowledge of literature was

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1. Anonymous, "Royalton Ripples", Lockport Daily Journal, March 10, 1880.

Mary C. Richardson



Your Friend  
Henry O. Sibley

Reproduction of name page in autograph book belonging to Mary C. Richardson, and inscribed by H.O.Sibley.

Royalton Oct. 15, 1854

Mary C. may graces be,  
 Ever hovering over thee;  
 May your spirit pure and fair,  
 Like a beautiful bird of air,  
 Find at last a peaceful haven  
 In the radiant fields of Heaven.

Miss Mary C. Richardson      Henry O. Sibley

Reproduction of Mr. Sibley's tribute to Miss Richardson.

amazing and he himself was no mean poet."<sup>1</sup>

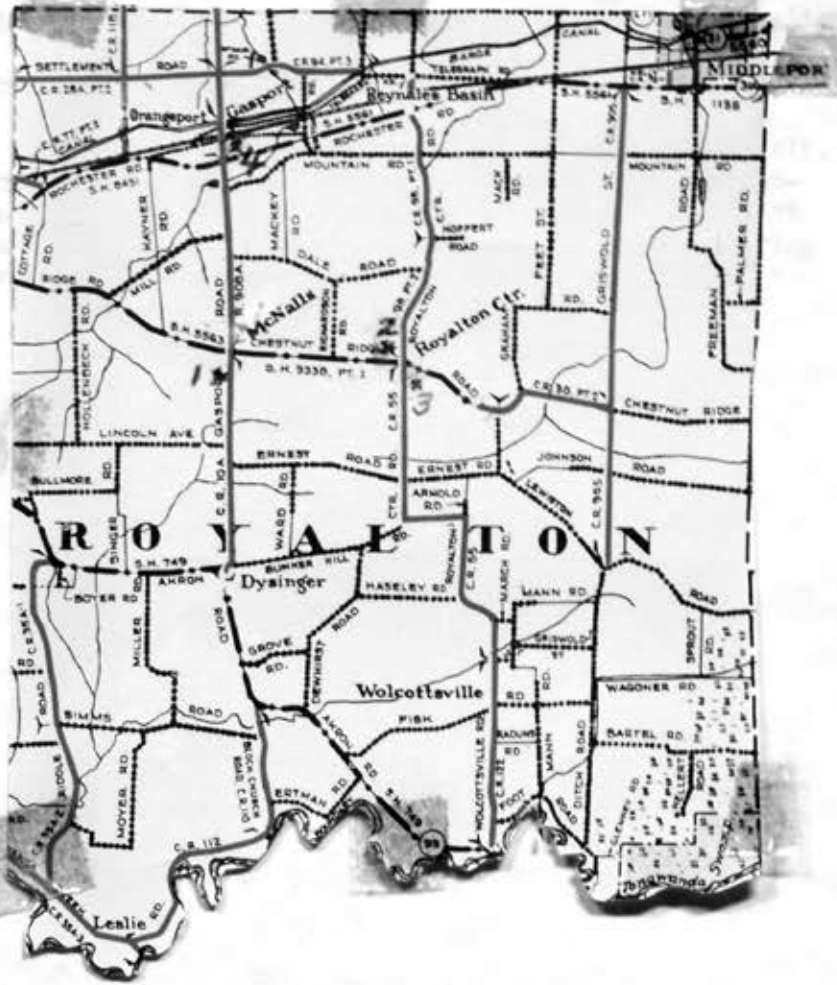
Portraits of Dr. and Mrs. Sibley hang in the library of the School of Library Science at Syracuse University.<sup>2</sup>

Of Henry's cousin, Frank J. V. Sibley, every recollection seems to have disappeared from the area. However, from the Niagara County Directory of 1869, it was learned that he still resided at McNalls Corners and that he was a General Insurance Agent. It was only a chance search of Who's Who in America which completed his story. His climb up the "Hill of Science" resulted in this reference.

"Sibley, Frank J.-mining engineer-born in Royalton, New York, on August 11, 1847. Educated in high schools with post-graduate courses in science and engineering. Married Alice K. Barney, 1866 and Mrs. Mary Charlton Edholm, 1905. President and general manager of Copper Creek (Arizona) Mining Company, general manager of Minnesota-Arizona Copper Company. For more than thirty years prominent leader in temperance and prohibition work. Secretary, State Prohibition Commission of New York, 1876-1877, Kansas 1880. Grand Chief Templar, Grand Templars of Nebraska 1881-1886 and in Georgia 1893-1897. Chairman, State Prohibition Commission of California, 1900. Founded several newspapers. Author of What Prohibition Did For Kansas, 1886, Life of John B. Finch, 1888, Templar at Work, 1890. Home in Copper Creek, Arizona, Office, 25 Broad Street, New York, New York."<sup>3</sup>

Upon learning the above information, it was possible to ascertain the location of his early home at McNalls Corners, and that his father was a farmer and a minister of the Gospel.<sup>4</sup>

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1. The above was taken from a newspaper clipping, April 1905.
  2. All information concerning Mr. Sibley at Syracuse University was learned from correspondence with Dr. Florence Van Hosen, Professor in the School of Library Science.
  3. Who's Who in America, vol. VIII, 1914-1915
  4. Niagara County Directory, 1869



LEGEND

- 1- Location of home of Frank J. V. Sibley, 1864
- 2- Location of home of Henry O. Sibley, 1864
- 3- Site of Royalton Centre Academy
- 4- Site of Gasport Academy

CONCLUSIONS

There seems to be no more fitting conclusion to this study of the early education in Niagara County, and particularly in the Town of Royalton, than the words of Mr. James Atwater in his story:

"Our schools are the bulwarks of our national safety. Stronger than armies and navies, they must have our constant and fostering care. Their success during the last century should be the assurance of greater success during the century to come."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Atwater, op. cit. , p. 51



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