

THE MEECH FAMILY

The story was old when we came to Shelburne. Perhaps at the end of the 18th century, there came a lean year- so lean that the earth did not yield grain enough for the sowing, and a young man walked over from Hinesburg to Shelburne and besought a Mr. Pierson, who I suspect lived in the stone house between the Bartlett corner and the Lake, to let him have wheat or corn enough to plant his land. Mr. Pierson roughly refused him, which angered the young man, Ezra Meech by name, and he swore by the nine gods that he would own all the land that then belonged to Mr. Pierson. Behold, in the following years, it came to pass, and a thousand acres, or more, in Shelburne extending even into the town of Charlotte, became his. He was usually called Judge Meech. He built the house later owned by Warner Bott, where he lived for many years. He was elected to Congress, whether as Senator or Representative I do not know. Upon his death, the property was divided between his two sons, Ezra and Edgar- Ezra taking the stone house as his home. He and Mrs. Meech were the parents of a large family of children, mostly grownup in my day. It was an ideally happy home, the children very fond of each other and obedient to their parents. Generously they lived, generously they gave and generously they spent. In about 1872 or 3, disaster came, and they lost their beautiful home. A sad loss not only for them but for the community at large. Mr. and Mrs. Meech were considerably past middle age, but they and their children faced the future with courage. The parents moved to Charlevoix, Michigan, where they spent the rest of their lives, and are buried there.

Three of the daughters were never married and two of the sons died without issue, so if the Meech name survives in any part of the United States, I do not know.

In Shelburne the name is only recalled as one reads it on the tombstones of the few who lie in the village church yard. As all the old friends of that time have passed on, But a thousand happy things might be said of that hospitable family and their life in Shelburne. I believe there is a small book still extant, written by the facile pen of Abby Hemenway, who wrote the "Vermont Gazetteer". The exact title of it I do not remember, but it was about Madam Meech, the second wife of Judge Meech, and relates further details of their life in Shelburne.

It must never be forgotten what our village library owes to Hannah Edgerton Tracy; how she snatched some forty books from a shelf in the Post Office, and through constant interest and effort, made the small beginning of our Library, a living thing, and through years her untiring work for it brought at last the foundation of our present Library. All this came about long before Mr. Pierson's money was given for this project. A tablet in her memory should rightfully be placed on the walls of our Library.

Another thing that the town should ever be mindful of is that it was the "Ever-Ready Circle of the Kings Daughters" that conceived the idea of improving our village, and to that end gave from their treasury fifty or sixty dollars as a nest-egg. Considerable enthusiasm was aroused and others took hold of the project. The sidewalks and the street lights are a direct result of their efforts.

CHURCHES - MOSTLY METHODIST

You of this year of grace 1936, picture to yourselves how on a Sunday morning in the early sixties, all Shelburne was astir, hurrying to the morning service held in the brick Church, the Methodist, in the village. They came from the Point, the Whites, two families; the Roots, the Blairs, the Collamers, the Rogers. From the east part of town, the Miners, the Barstows, the Suttons, the Reeds, 2 families and the Russells and Elliotts. From the Falls our grandmother Taylor stepped out from her home to walk over to the Church, very likely a small grandson trudging beside her, carrying her hymn book and, if in summer, a sprig of caraway tucked in between the leaves in case the sermon became tiresome. If grandmother on her way lifted her eyes to the upper road falling down to the village from the brick house she would see the Meech family hurrying in a big four seated wagon drawn by a pair of strong horses. In the front seat, Mr. and Mrs. Ezra Meech and the three seats behind them, filled with children of varying ages. The services began rather early. It was the custom for different groups of people, each under a class leader, to hold a brief service before the regular one. I suppose it was an exchange of religious experiences. The class rooms were in the basement of that old Church. I presume the minister chose the more able among his flock to be these class leaders.

After these preliminary meetings of about one half hours length, the classes gathered in the Church above for the regular morning service. I have said before that Mr. Simon Curry led the choir which was seated in a gallery of the church

opposite the pulpit. Whether the congregation rose and faced the choir as they sang turning their backs on the minister, I do not remember, but it was the common custom. Among the hymns most frequently sung were "Am I a Soldier of the Cross", "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood" which gave to an Aunt of mine as a small girl, terror and filled her with horror. I presume they sang also "Broad is the Road that Leads to Death", and they sang "Blow Ye the Trumpet Blow", "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing."

One entered the brick Church by a flight of steps, into a long narrow vestibule. At either end was a door leading into the main part of the Church. One went up some steps and on the level were stoves. A double row of pews occupied the middle of the Church. In those front pews sat our best families, and those who "took the lower seats in the synagogue" took pains to get as near the stove as possible, in winter. Three or four pews at right angles with the pulpit, were occupied by the observed of all observers. The Sunday School was held in the same room and was large and flourishing. There were several families of Episcopalians in town. As they had no Church at that time, their children came to the Methodist Sunday School. The teachers were very able women, Mrs. Ezra Meech, Mrs. Taylor, Mrs. Levi Blair, Mrs. Charlotte Comstock, and others. How I wish I could remember them all. If there was an adult class, I do not recall it. One of the remembrances of my childhood in the Church is the charming rustle of Mrs. Lavater White's silk dress, of royal purple, as she hastened up the aisle, a trifle late. Among others who gathered there in those days were the Lyons and Blinn families from the Burlington Road, and others whom I have forgotten. / The Spears, in that part of

the town, the Harringtons in the village, the Harmons who lived where Walter Webster now does, the Saxtons, the Edgar Nashs from the west part of town, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Weed, the Myron Reed family, were Episcopalians. These devoted people determined at some time to build a Church of their own, and so, little by little, through long years, accumulated sufficient funds to build the handsome structure now standing. The stones for its building were quarried from the Eddy ledge to the north of the village, and in the 80s the main part of the building was dedicated and services were held there. Soon afterward when Dr. and Mrs. Webb came to live in the town, they enlarged and beautified the Church, adding the porte cochere, enlarging the chancel and putting in the memorial windows. A few years later, Mrs. Webb built the parish house in memory of her mother, Mrs. William H. Vanderbilt, fully equipping it, a beautiful and generous gift and greatly appreciated by the people of the parish. The grounds about the Church were also handsomely laid out and planted with varieties of fir-trees which will ever be a memorial to Dr. and Mrs. Webb's great generosity.

I must speak of the Evangelistic Meetings or "Revivals" which were held from time to time in the Methodist Church, mostly in the winter season when there was more leisure time for the people from their duties, and possibly their morale needed toning up. The revivalists were mostly men, but at one time a woman of remarkable magnetic power came to Shelburne and stirred up a number of old and hardened men sinners, both in our town and the adjoining ones, lifting them up to a higher level, for the time being anyway, and maybe to the end of their days, who can say.

These revival meetings were a good illustration of the "Parable of the Sowers" in the New Testament.

At a period of time and for several years the W. C. T. U. had a small following, and the State President lived in Shelburne. If there had been a "Carrie Nation" among them, that black thing the open saloon in the village would have been smashed for once and for all.

Sophia Bartlett Harmon