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SHELBURNE FALLS

1867

On the west side of the wooden bridge was a saw mill. The LaPlotte river at that time was quite a stream, making a sizeable pond just above the saw mill. A dam built back of the mill furnished the power. Another dam to the north, turned the wheels of the grist-mill, falling into a pleasant quiet stream flowing through the meadows of Mr. Newell and Mr. Harrington. Turning west, it ran under the old wooden bridge north of the village on the main highway, and so on, with a few curves and turnings to the head of the Bay. Altogether it was a pretty stream, and on its banks in season, grew the wild cardinal flower, and in a little backwater of the stream, grew a great bed of white water-lillies. In winter, when the stream was frozen, the skaters among the young of the town, glided down the bay and out upon the Lake. Sleighing parties also drove out upon the frozen bay, to Burlington. Returning to the Falls, I do not remember ever having heard who built the stone grist-mill, but many a bushel of wheat and of corn was ground there in those days when that business was lively. I have been told that between that and the bridge once stood a woolen mill, but all trace of it was gone, in my day. The saw mill did a thriving business also, in sawing up the logs the farmers brought in. The mill yard on the side hill above the mill was often filled with the logs, which furnished the farmers their home supply of lumber.

Stepping through the bridge, at the left hand side was a small brown house, and back of it a blacksmith shop. There lived Simon Curry, who led the choir in the Methodist Church and was active in all its services. Passing up the hill, the small white house at its top, where Mike and Mary Coggins now live, was the home of Mr. Smith Pierson, father of Mr. James Pierson, our

Library benefactor. Whether Mr. Smith Pierson was of the first or second generation from the original family of settlers of that name, I do not know. Further up the hill, and a steep one it was, stood, and stands today, the home of Homer Irish, still occupied by members of his family. Mr. Irish was a skillful worker with tools, and did most beautiful carpenter work. He it was, who more than sixty years ago, laid the handsome hard wood floors, made of three different kinds of woods, in narrow strips in the old Ezra Meech house, now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Bostwick.

In my time, there were three different Lake families, Mr. Curtis Lake, who lived in the house on the road from the falls to Charlotte, now owned by Mr. Stebbins. Nearer to the Falls lived his brother Hazelton Lake, grandfather of Frances Burritt Shearer. Another brother, Elijah Lake, lived on the road to "Baptist Corners", beyond the Falls, where Fred Thomas now lives. Further, on that road where Milo Webster now lives, John Naramore lived. A daughter, Jennie Naramore was the wife of Henry Roberts. They at one time occupied the house, afterward moving to the village, and were very important members of the Methodist church, and of the community.

Among the houses that stood on the one street of the Falls, and still remains after all these years, is that where Allen Bacon lives, and also the house on the other side of the store and further on, Mr. Fred Bacon's house. On the site of the store, now owned by Mr. Stacy, a little one story building stood, and many a bottle of patent medicine went over the counter beside the needful food products. On the other side of the street where Mrs. John Noonan lives, stands the house which was old then, and opposite it, another quite as old.

On the road from the Falls to the village, on the east side, a cheese factory was built, a beautiful spring of water furnishing its supply, and probably the reason for the factory being built there. A Mr. James White owned it.

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Afterward moved it to the village. South of the freight station where it served later as a roller-skating rink. And later still as a tenement.

The small house north of the Weed homestead, now owned by Mrs. Deyett, was built for a Wesleyan Methodist Church, when and where, I do not know. The first "Town Hall" was built in my day, and there we received our higher education, and the seats being wooden benches with no proper equipment for a school-room. Learning was hard to get, though the teachers did their best.

Tracy and Maeck's store went through several changes of ownership. The Post Office, for years occupied the north east corner of it until later it was moved to its present site. No one may remember now, that the brick house belonging to the estate of Henry and Charles Tracy, was built of bricks that formed the walls of the old Methodist Church, and was the home of Mr and Mrs Lee Tracy, parents of Julius, Henry and Charles.

In 1867, Colonel Frederick Fletcher occupied the next house north. A very grand and commanding figure he was. He was the grandfather of Carl Fletcher. Afterward the house was occupied by Mr. Geer, whose wife was Hannah Harrington, an aunt of Henry Harrington.

There lived a sainted woman familiarly known as Aunt Charlotte Comstock, in the house where Mrs Deyett now lives. At that time the house that is now our library was the Methodist Parsonage. The Troy Conference sent a large and varied number of ministers to preside over the Methodist Church. Among the earliest was the Rev. James Edgerton, the father of Mrs. Julius Tracy, an earnest man of strong character. I have heard it said he did a world of good, especially among the young men, who even in that time, were given to idling away their time at the hotel. He was returned by the Troy Conference to Shelburne more than once afterward. About 1870, I believe he was there, as at that time his daughter was married to Julius Tracy. I have no doubt that Mr. Edgerton

inspired and encouraged the Methodist Society to build the handsome stone Church which now stands as a monument to their efforts. Its history has been well recorded. It was noted, I hope, that the stones of which it is built, were quarried in Willsboro across the lake from Shelburne, and were brought over on the ice with ox teams.

Through the Falls Bridge to the right turned the road to Baptist Corners in Charlotte. On that road, not far from the bridge, still stands a small white house, the home then of Mr Ira Andrews. He was the great grandfather of Roy Patrick who with his father, John Patrick and his sons, John and Robert, carry on the great business of the G. S. Blodgett Co., in Burlington. A son of Ira Andrews, Giles by name, built the house where Eustace Thomas now lives. His oldest sons, Truman and Edward, were in my generation. Truman will still be remembered in the town as he and his family lived on the Nelson farm, just over the Charlotte line, his wife being Sarah Nelson. Edward, after his graduation from U.V.M. in the early 70's studied law and settled in New York State, never coming back to his native town.

Sometime in the early sixties, the Marble Quarry was opened in the east part of the town. It was thought at first to be of good value but for some reason, the business ended in a short time. That vein of stone ran south through the town and just over the Charlotte line onto the farm of Mr. Lewis Nelson. His son-in-law, Truman Andrews, while living there, opened a lime-kiln, but it too, proved a failure, largely owing, I believe, to the difficulty of getting the product to the railroad, and so to market.

Dr. Jonathan Taylor and his wife, Asenath Little, came to Shelburne sometime between 1831 and 1835. He bought twelve acres of land from Mr. Morse, in Shelburne Falls and built the house which a few years ago was the Woodman's Hall. There he lived to old age, practicing his profession. I have heard it said that following the custom of those days and that school of medicine (allopathic) he

gave pills "as big as your two thumbs" and too pull a tooth he sat the patient on the doorstep below him and applied the forceps. Being a large, powerful man, one can picture the result. He was strictly honest, upright man, and when he found that a patients ailments were largely imaginery, he bluntly told him so, for the doctors of that early day knew little of the value of psychologic treatment.

He and Mrs Taylor were members of the Methodist Church. He often sought his closet and wrestled mightily in prayer. In his later years, when it became difficult for him to walk around he would say with a groan, "The iniquities of my heels hath encompassed me" because in his youth he had loved to dance.

Dr. and Mrs. Taylors children, partly grownup when they came to Shelburne, were John Syng Dorsey Taylor, Joseph Wetherbee Taylor, Asenath and Nancy. The sons soon afterword entered the University of Vermont and then out into the world, so that they never shared very much in the social life of Shelburne.

Across the road from Dr. Taylor's lived the Bliss family. Very important citizens of the town in their day. Mr. George Bliss and his family in 1867 occupied the old home. He was the father of Bishop George Yemane Bliss, who was born in that house, and was brother of J. Isham Bliss, a much loved and prominent Episcopal Clergyman in the norther part of our state. Mr. George Bliss planted the hedge of tall cedars which extends from Paul Laviclett's corner to Mr. Westmore's house; planted it to protect a young orchard from the cold north winds. In that same year (1867) they moved to Brandon and a few years later to California, and settled in Santa Barbara, where Mr. Bliss bought land and planted a nut orchard, which today is in the possession of the remaining members of the family, and is still bearing fruit. Mr. Bliss may be thought of as a lover and planter of trees. The fine old house in later years was turned into a creamery and at last burned.

After the fire some interesting facts of its history came to light. The founder of the family was Moses Bliss and it is written of him that he came to St. George from (Z) and in one day, with the help of a friend, built a house! in which he and his wife lived for six months at least, during which time she never saw another woman. Afterward Mr. Bliss came to Shelburne and bought the farm now owned by Mke Thompson. Ruth Read once told me that there being no bridge across the La Plotte River at the Falls in those early days, a road ran from the south on the east side of the stream, below the rise of ground on which the Thompson house is built, on to the north passing through the Read farm at the foot of the hill, and so to Burlington. I do not remember ever to have heard when that old wooden bridge in the Falls was built, but after it was built, Mr. Bliss bought the land where the old house stood, building the house from materials grown on the farm.

I have been told it was the custom in those days, to mix the lime for plastering putting in plenty of cow hair to bind it together and then to bury the mass in the ground for a whole year, when they considered it sufficiently well cured. When they put it on the walls and the ceiling fully an inch thick. The lath, instead of in separate strips as we have seen, was made of thin boards, slit thus making cracks to hold the plaster. My grandmother has often told that Mrs Bliss brought many a pail of milk from the Thompson farm to the house in the falls. A member of the Bliss family said in later years that Mr. Bliss was the first one in Shelburne to have a carpet in his house and people came from all around to see and admire it, hardly daring to step on it, so fine it was. I believe Mrs Moses Bliss was the daughter of a Joshua Isham, as that name appears in the next generation and in the following one also. The mother of (Father) William Harmon was also an Isham, and a sister of Mrs. Bliss.