

The Haunts of the Leatherstockings

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**Chautauqua Society of History
And Natural Science**

**Presented at Annual Meeting
Held at Westfield, N.Y.
September 2d, 1914**

146-7-48

It was my pleasure a few days ago to scale the southern rise of the Mohawk Valley and rediscover in the depths of a sylvan paradise, the Haunted Lake, shimmering, shining, sparkling, smiling, under the clear heavens all by itself, pure and beautiful as on the radiant morning of its creation.

On every side the hills gathering together, Mount Vision at the foot turning her back upon old Crumhouse down the valley and, at the head, The Sleeping Lion majestically guarding the northern pass. The mountains rising from either shore are densely wooded from waterline to tiptops.

A little stream leaves the foot and steals away gently and unobtrusively, rippling along through pleasant meadows and gathering strength from every hillside, rolling southward past thriving villages and crowded cities, through rich farm lands and mountain stonehouses of coal and iron, five hundred miles to the long arm of the sea where the mighty Susquehanna mingles with the Chesapeake.

The air is filled with an unseen presence and a spirit moves on the face of the deep. A master mind has hallowed the scene and the waters on the pebbly beach murmurs a name familiar to many nations and languages, but nowhere so affectionately recalled as upon the shores of Otsego Lake.

James Fennimore Cooper is gone these sixty years and three, but the magic of his genius lingers around the lake he so lovingly described, and his actions haunt the scenes he so vividly staged.

I heard the musical laugh of Wah-ta-wah, the gentle Indian maid and glimpsed the beauty of frail, unhappy Judith; I heard the stentorian voice of Harry Harry lounging in the doorway of the Ark; I saw, at dusk, the camp-fires of the Iroquois gleaming from the gravelly points, and the dim outlines of Muskrat Castle where the rushes wave on the shoal of Hutter's Island.

Dear, honest Natty Bumppo skims the lake in his canoe and roams the woods around, hunting deer with dog and gun, stealing into church with his Mohican brother to hear the words of Parson Grant, hastening across Mt. Vision to rescue Elizabeth Temple from the cruel claws of a panther, and sometimes hiding in a tree-top to watch the hostile red men rendezvousing at the Council Rock. And then the old trapper with frosted locks and trembling steps, shading his eyes from the setting sun to gaze out over the glimmer-glass and the scenes of his youthful exploits.

Cooper's literary career was compassed in thirty years during which he published thirty-nine volumes, thirty-two being novels – an amount of mental and physical labor rarely equalled.

During his eight years residence in New York City he was a favorite member of a literary club numbering in its circle Washington Irving, Bryant, Halleck, Bancroft, Gaylord Clarke, George P. Morris, N.P. Willis, Parke Goodwin, Chancellor Kent, Jarvis the painter and Morse, the inventor of the telegraph. He lived but seventeen of those thirty years at Cooperstown, during which he published twenty-four of his books, The Deerslayer being the first of the series but the last written and perhaps the most powerful and dramatic of them all.

I have seen most of the lakes and rivers of our state and Otsego is the fairest jewel of them all. All its (*****) them with romance and song, with legends and history.

The renegade Brant, at the head of a horde of blood-thirsty Mohawks and the scum of British soldiery, set forth, some two months prior to the Declaration of Independence, on a campaign of rapine and murder, joined St. Leger in the siege of Fort Stanwix, participated in the battle of Oriskany, crossed into Pennsylvania and led the massacre of Wyoming; ravaged the Susquehanna and Mohawk valleys and outlying settlements for two years and, with Butler, committed the horrible butchery at Cherry Valley, some eight miles east of the head of Otsego Lake.

Then Gen. Washington directed a plan of reprisal and chastisement. Early in 1779 Brodhead was ordered up the Allegany valley and eastward. Gen. Sullivan came back from Wyoming to Tioga Point and Gen. James Clinton marched up the Mohawk with 1200 men, left the river near Canajoharie and, carrying a large number of boats, crossed

the hills some twenty miles to Otsego Lake, floated down and camped on the present site of Cooperstown.

The outlet, which is the head of the east branch of the Susquehanna, is an inconsiderable stream. Gen. Clinton constructed a heavy dam across it and, during the days the water was rising, his men cleared the channel below.

Early in August, the lake having acquired more than two feet additional head, Clinton embarked his men, cut down and, on the crest of the flood, easily and speedily made his way down the river, joining Sullivan on the 11th of that month.

It is recorded that the Indians seeing a great flood swelling under an unclouded sky and bearing rapidly a huge army of enemies through their fields and hunting grounds, and believing that the Great Spirit was exhibiting his wrath towards them, fled to where the forest shadows being deepest and left Clinton's way unimpeded.

The site of this dam is marked by a boulder, on top of which is a mortar, and old-fashioned, short-barreled, wide-mouthed iron cannon, with an explanatory bronze tablet set into the stone.

This monument was erected by the D.A.R.

Nearby and across the beginning of the outlet is the Council Rock. A mile up the east side of the lake is the Cooper Monument, surmounted by the statue of Leatherstocking. Straight up back of it is Mt. Vision. Half a mile north is Leatherstocking's Cave and three miles beyond is Gravelly Point where Deerslayer had his first combat with an Indian. Across the lake are Leatherstocking Falls, Mohican Canyon, Point Judith and Hannah's Hill. All the hotels, camps and points of interest are commemorative of scenes and characters in Cooper's Tales.

In the village are Leatherstocking and Pioneer streets and Cooper Park; the Fennimore Hotel, the O-te-sa-ga, the Sagamore and the Cooper House.

The steamers, each making two, or three round trips a day, are the Mohican, the Glimmer-glass, the Deerslayer and the Pathfinder.

The old grounds of Otsego Hall whence Judge Cooper directed the management of his vast estate are now a well-kept public park. The manor house was destroyed by fire in 1853, and on its site stands, on a huge boulder, a bronze statue of an Indian hunter, crouching, as he peers into the forest, holding a bow and arrows in one hand and restraining his dog with the other. Nearby is the churchyard where Cooper and his wife and others of the family lie buried. Here also is the monument erected by appreciative citizens to the memory of Father Nash, an important personage of that section a century and a half ago.

The village owns a fine library building in which may be found many valuable relics and scraps of interesting history.

From brief investigation of these, from the "Annals of Richfield" – a village at the north end of Otsego county, and from rummaging through many family records, it seems that Otsego furnished more of Chautauqua's early settlers than any other county of the state, except Madison.

I present a few names that may be of interest with year of arrival, if known, and town located in. Not all were native of Otsego, but all, at some time, resided there:

ARKWRIGHT

Aaron Wilcox – 1809, Nathan Eaton – 1810, Benjamin Sprague, Uriah Johnson and Robert Cowden – 1811; Simeon Clinton, quite a famous surveyor – 1812.

BUSTI

Abraham Pier – 1814; Asa Bly

CARROLL

Horatio Thornton – 1816; Daniel Robbins – 1832;

CHARLOTTE

Fanny Edson Sinclair and Nathaniel Holdridge – 1810; Abel and Horace Potter – 1817;

Bela B. Lord – 1819; Chester Lyman – 1825;

CHAUTAUQUA

The Green Brothers – William, 1824; George A. – 1828, Richard O. – 1833

CHERRY CREEK

John Carr, William Carr and son Truman, Mrs. Horatio Hill;

CLYMER

Ebenezer Brownell;

DUNKIRK

Daniel Pier

ELLERY

Clark Parker - 1810; Thomas Parker - 1812, Amos Wood - 1830; Orvis Hale, 1839;

Deacon Josiah Maples and son, Charles G., once Surrogate of this county;

GERRY

John McCullaugh - 1817;

HANOVER

James Knapp - 1810; George W. Tew, Capt. Roger Moore and son Jehel; Jeremiah Ellsworth, 1828;

HARMONY

Thomas Slayton and son Reuben - 1806; Myron Bly, 1809; Theron Bly, 1810; William Kelso, Charles Parker, William Matteson, Obediah Morley, James and Homer Pringle, the latter the father of our member of the same name came with his parents in 1829; Hawks Hewes late of Mayville;

KIANTONE

Jasper Marsh

MINA

Randall T. Holdridge, 1836; and Alexander Holdridge, 1841;

POLAND

Summer Allen, 1818; Col. Nathaniel Fenton, 1823; Joseph Clark Jr., 1831; His father came here in 1809, cleared four acres, went back and later was succeeded by his son who was ancestor of a very large family; Luther Lydell, Joshua Woodward, Ezra Smith; Horace, the father of William and Chancellor Hartson, Samuel Hitchcock, maternal grandfather of Maj. W.S. Cameron of Jamestown;

POMFRET

Jonathan Sprague, 1810; Dr. Squire White, 1809, studied medicine at Cherry Valley; the late Hon. Oscar W. Johnson, 1838; Isaac Huntley;

RIPLEY

Robert Dunlap, 1803; Perry G. Ellsworth, 1804; Robert Dickson, 1809, father of Samuel, William, Robert, Fayette and Andrew; Moses A. Tennant, 1833, grandfather of Moses D. Tennant of Westfield;

SHERMAN

Joel Cornish, 1826;

SHERIDAN

Rev. John Spencer, the most famous preacher of pioneer days in the north part of this county. The town has erected a monument inscribed with fitting tributes to his memory;

STOCKTON

Waterman Ellsworth – 1827; and the first Washington Windsor, an early Baptist minister;

VILLENOVA

Orris Wright;

WESTFIELD

Frances Todd, wife of George W. Paterson the second, Larkin Harrington;

ELLICOTT AND JAMESTOWN

William H. Fenton, 1813, among whose children were Emery W. and Wm. F., and Mrs. Charles L. Jeffords; Gen. Horace Allen, 1815; Rufus Pier, the latter, Wm Tew, father of Wm. H., who once was President of the City National Bank; Samuel Brown, the father-in-law of our secretary Judge Abner Hazeltine, who is a graduate of the old Academy at Cherry Valley; Samuel A. Brown, an able lawyer, once District Attorney and, in 1828 made agent of the Cherry Valley Land Co. for the sale of about 40,000 acres in the eastern part of this county. Judge Richard P. Maroni studied law with Isaac Seely at Cherry Valley.

In Revolutionary times there lived in Richfield Springs in the northern part of Otsego county, one Obadiah Beardsley, and he was father of three sons, all of whom became lawyers. Samuel was elevated to the Supreme Bench and eventually was Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals. Levi, although never a resident of our county, owned large tracts of land along its eastern border and John M. Edson, the father of our President Obed Edson, was his sales agent.

Obediah Beardsley Jr. had a daughter, Mary, who married Elijah Norton Jr. who was Captain of a company raised by him for service in the War of 1812. Among their children were Samuel H. Norton, an Episcopal minister who, prior to 1864, was for some time Rector of Fredonia. Another son, Levi W. also was a clergyman and was for several years Rector of St. Lukes in Jamestown. Their youngest daughter, Mary, was born in Genesee County in 1815 but, at the age of two years, went back to Richfield to live with her grandfather Beardsley. At the age of twenty-four she was married to Robert Johnson Merrill of that place and they subsequently removed to this county.

Father Nash, before mentioned, was her Sunday school teacher and she says, "I think he baptized all my mother's children".

Half a century ago Mrs. Merrill, then living at Sinclairville, danced me on her knee.

She died at Jamestown in April 1913 in her ninety-ninth year.

The second son of Capt. Norton and Mary Beardsley was Morris who came to this county in 1833 and settled at Ashville where, for many years, he was a Justice, and celebrated as a peace-maker among his belligerent neighbors.

He also served the Town of Harmony as Supervisor and was County Superintendent of Poor.

Of his six daughters one was the first wife of Dr. Wm. P. Bemus of Jamestown and mother of Mrs. Helene Hatch and Dr. Morris N. Bemus. Another daughter became the wife of Col. (afterward Major) Enoch A. Curtis of Fredonia, one of our honored and active members.

Morris Norton was a natural lawyer; he had a rare literary taste, and wrote much of both prose and poetry. One beautiful poem of his may be found in the Centennial History of Chautauqua County.

Obediah Beardsley was a neighbor and intimate friend of Obed Edson Jr. who was the grandfather of our Obed Edson.

The first wife of that Obed Edson was Aurora Higgins, but her married life was short. The nurse in her last sickness was a young woman named Fanny Bigelow who, a year or so later was married to that Obed Edson by the same Father Nash who, by the way is used in Cooper's "Pioneer" for the character of "Parson Grant".

That Obed Edson moved over into Madison County where he soon died and his widow married a brawny young man, lately Major of New Hampshire soldiery in the Revolutionary War, named Samuel Sinclair. In 1810 they came to this county and founded the village of Sinclairville.

In this paper, I have tried to weave together some biography and history with a bit of romance and scenery, without becoming tedious. In closing I wish to add that I have examined many histories – of places and people, of states and nations, of parties and families – and that the Centennial History of Chautauqua County is the peer of any.

No other county, so far as I have been able to determine, has any thing to compare well with it. In breadth of scope, in depth of research, in exhaustiveness of detail, in the method of dividing the labor, choice of department writers, in volume, accuracy, language, in style and finish it is a masterpiece and a classic.

In the days to come where this historical work is more widely known, and other counties are seeking a model from which to inscribe their histories, men will more fully appreciate the talent and the love of work that has builded a monument, grander than shaft of polished marble and more enduring than solid bronze, to our grand old citizen and respected President, the Honorable Obed Edson.