History of

An Orchard, 1907

Mrs. Mark Cheney
The Whole History of a Chautauqua Orchard and all Within a Lifetime.

This story like Robbins' Ancient History seems to be divided into periods, each period being however only about ten years.

One Autumn day in the very beginning of the Nineteenth Century, a gentleman rode on horseback over the hills into Vermont Wardsboro' South District. This was Ebenezer Cheney of North Orange, Massachusetts. He came to visit his son Ebenezer, who with his young wife, Anna Nelson, had come to Vermont in 1786, and the family now consisted of Ruby, Polly, Nelson Ebenezer, and Levi, and one child had died. The grandfather was a tall gray haired man of over sixty years, wearing knee breeches and buckles, and carrying saddle-bags across his horse. He was a dignified fine looking gentleman, as became the father of seventeen children who are recorded as "the handsomest family in Massachusetts".

There is a dreadful story told that he was the father of twenty-three children, but there were only seventeen of whom we have record, and if six others were born to his house, it is reasonable to suppose that at a very early age they severally withdrew in favor of the Joneses and the Halls and the Davises.

From the saddle-bags of this visitor, there were brought forth three or four small apples which having been cut into suitable pieces, were distributed to the members of the family, with the injunction "We must save all the seeds". After
the feast, the Grandfather took the seeds and with the four children following him, planted them at the roots of a hemlock stub, which stood in the southwest corner of the garden, at the foot of a rock which for one hundred feet formed the western wall of the garden and dooryard.

A few years later, the boys transplanted these seedlings into the orchard already begun, just northwest of the house.

Ebenezer Cheney had built a saw-mill with a "run of stone" in addition, where he sawed the logs, and ground the grain of his neighbors as well as his own. The water power was a stream called "The Branch" which fell twenty feet clear over a rock, and in 1873 the water was still running, and another mill in the place of this one still sawing and grinding.

These years were a time of some anxiety to the father of the family. The gristmill brought steady toll from the small grain fields of the Halls and the Joneses, but the hills were steep and rocky and the valleys were narrow, and the family had grown by the coming of Anna, Abigail, Maria and Seth. There were interesting rumors afloat of desirable lands in Western New York where great forests of white pine, hills crowned with magnificent maples, wide valleys, and ample water power, invited settlers.

So at the close of our first decade, we find him coming on horseback with two of his neighbors, first to Westfield, then on to the valley of the Stillwater. On his return he stopped at Batavia, and entered claim to several pieces of land. Coming every year, he later took up land in Poland and in Randolph seeking always the white pine timber, the sites for sawmills and the wide valleys. In 1812 he brought apple seeds from the or-
In Vermont, and having cleared five or six acres on Lot 12 - now Kiantone, he planted quite a nursery.

The family came in 1814, lived two or three years in a log house on Lot 12, built a house in Jamestown on the west side of Pine Street, between Second and Third, and lived there two years, then moved into a frame house built on another part of Lot 13.

Anna was married to Elial T. Poole in the Pine Street house, on the last day of December 1817.

1820

In the summer of this year the men came to Poland, where they already had built a small frame house on Dry Brook, at the head of the valley opening on the main Conewango Valley. Maria, then fourteen years old, kept the house for her father and brothers that summer, while they built another house more commodious in an opening with maple trees, just south of where now runs the Erie railroad. The timbers of this house were all hewn and planed by hand - posts and beams, joists and rafters; and it still stands a part of the present farm house, in evidence of the skill and industry of the builders. A pleasant incident in Maria's memory of that summer, was that of going one Sunday with her brother Nelson, down the Conewango in a skiff to a meeting in the Dolloff school house when Elder Barlow preached, and we can imagine the Congregation singing "Old Hundred" and "Dundee" and "Exhortation Common Meter."

The family moved into the new house in 1821. Then a saw mill was built on Dry Brook with a race one hundred rods in length taking the water at the upper end of the valley.

Next an orchard must be planted near by, but the growth...
of timber, especially of pine, was immense, and after the logs for sawing were taken off, the removal of the remaining brush and growth was a problem. This enterprise was greatly furthered by a "Ree" to which the few neighbors came with oxteams, but at the end of the day's work of hauling and piling, the men and teams found themselves entirely shut in by the heaps they had made, and were obliged to open up a way especially for exit. When this land was sufficiently cleared and cleaned up, it was planted with seedling trees from the nursery on Lot 12. The family remained here till the fall of 1823, moving then to the Levi Jones farm, where Seth some years later built the present "stone house" in Kiantone.

The Poland property was left to tenants for a few years, but in the spring of 1828 Nelson E. took possession, and in January 1829 he was married to Hannah Merrill who had taught school at Scarsburg.

In the summer of 1828, the present highway was laid out where it now is, with William Peacock on horseback, in ruffled shirt and silver knee buckles, to inspect the operation and the job was let to Anson Lect.

1830.

Now things began to happen. In this year a daughter was born, in 1832 a son, and in 1836 two sons. There was a family growing as well as an orchard, and one can see abundant reason for the apple trees to grow vigorously as they did.

Sometime during 1832 a silver teaspoon was lost, and the loss was attributed then as now to that universal scapegoat the "hired girl".
The upright part of the present farm house was built in 1834, making the residence of the family on the new highway.

The next ten years the boys grew and went to school, the trees grew and year by year were grafted with improved scions, and the house was enlarged by additions. During this period the apples were killed by frost two or three years in succession, a calamity which befell other families of children and other orchards.

The orchard was in its prime, Greenings and Golden Sweetings, Swaars and Gilliflows, Wine apples and Risley apples (the latter in the Blodgett orchard in Busti called "Orange apples") and piles and piles of sweet apples from the ungrafted trees.

The latter part of this decade, the route of the Erie railway was surveyed and much work done. The road was called the Atlantic and Great Western then, and was supposed to open this part of the country to the rest of the world, but it certainly was annoying to have the gangs of workmen carry off apples by the pail and the bag and the basket.

This year till 1870 included four years of Civil War. The three boys were married. Nobody thought much about the orchard. It had seemed a permanent thing, but it really was growing old.

During this period it was observed that many limbs on the apple trees were dying. The trees were very tall, and difficult to climb for picking apples. Indeed, one man fell, but caught himself before reaching the ground. The orchard was evidently past its prime, and the apples were not as fine as they used to be.
1880. Scientific trimming and spraying were not understood or practiced but some efforts were made at cultivation, and in plowing one day the silver teaspoon was found. It had been lost fifty years, and was somewhat bent, but a silver teaspoon still.

It began to be talked that the ground on which the orchard stood might raise many times the value of the apples, in hay or corn or potatoes. So in the winter of 1885 and 1886 the trees were cut into stove wood and drawn away. In the spring of 1887 the roots were blown up with dynamite, and together with the brush put into piles and set on fire. One day in May, while the orchards on the neighboring hillsides were pink and white with bloom, the boy who helped his grandfather plant the seeds in Vermont; now an old man of nearly ninety-four years, leaned on his staff and watched the last of his orchard drift away in puffs of smoke, and fall into little heaps of ashes.

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