

The Days of Long Ago (1886)

The following are the recollections of a former Waterville resident in an 1886 interview by historian Amos Osborn. The article was originally published in the Waterville Reflex — a newspaper which later merged with The Waterville Times — and reprinted as follows by the Times early in the 20th century.

"We had just as good parties when I was young as they do now," said a lady to her friend. Does that sound familiar? The date was January 19, 1886. Under the head of "A Reminiscence or Two," this lady, now long since passed away, told of the days long ago, describing old-time amusements. She also reminded us that right here in our local cemetery a lady of French nobility lies buried.

But on with our story.

A Reminiscence or Two

While conversing recently with a lady who was born in this town more than seventy years ago, the conversation turned upon the days of her girlhood and she remarked that she had noticed by the papers that the Pickwick party was put down as the pleasantest one ever given in Waterville. "I don't believe that," said our aged friend. "We had just as good parties when I was young as they do now," and then she spoke of the good old times when they used to begin dancing before dark and didn't "go home till morning."

In those days the main dance was the 4th of July, and she instanced one when dancing was begun at sundown and continued until the sun shone in at the windows. On all holiday occasions like Washington's Birthday, Christmas and New Year's, there were frequent parties given here in the old hotel where the American now stands, and in fact a part of the same building.

Their music was picked up here and there, where they could get it, and usually consisted of two violins and a bass viol, and sometimes, when a number got together at a private house and wanted to dance, the inspiration for the figured and waltzes was found in the songs of the dancers - songs without words, usually. They knew nothing of the fancy dances of today, but were happy with such old country dances as Virginia Reel, French Four and Money Musk. It was a frequent thing to go over to Bridgewater in parties to attend the military balls. The late Governor Seymour was frequently seen at these balls.

Military Balls Given

Military balls were given here, too, and our informant expressed it as her opinion that they were as fine as anything of the present day and generation. She showed us a well preserved invitation to a party which read as follows: "Cotillion Party - The Company of Mr. --- and lady is requested at the Hall of the American Hotel, R. M. Smith's, on Tuesday, the 26th of December - By order of the Committee of Arrangements - Waterville, Nov. 22nd, 1837 - George H. Church, Daniel C. Clark, Managers."

When she was told that the manager of the above party first named was present at the recent Pickwick party and danced the Money Musk, which was given for his and other old timers' benefit, she was not surprised, for he used to be very fond of dancing, she said. It did not seem at all remarkable to her that there was present at the party, a few weeks ago, a man who had attended a similar party in an adjoining building not quite half a century before. It struck us as a little bit unusual, and we venture to say there were very few others at the Pickwick party who had been dancing fifty years and were as agile as the 'Squire was on that occasion mentioned.

Old Time Cherry Rides

From speaking of the parties and balls, conversation passed to the rides the young folks used to have. O, those rides! Cherry rides, they were called. Probably the upstarts of the present day don't know in what a cherry ride consists.

Well, we didn't either until our entertaining friend enlightened us. A cherry ride is a ride after cherries. In these days carriages for easy transportation were not very common, there being but one or two in town. A three seated, straight-backed, uncovered affair was owned at "Putnam's Tavern," and with this and perhaps another filled with jolly loads of young folks - about equally divided as to sex of course - they started in the afternoon for the cherry trees on some farm at a reasonable distance from town.

A frequent trip was on the road toward Clinton. If the cherries were not always of the sweetest and most inviting variety the fun of such an excursion was never wanting. The farmers were always glad to see the young folks, got them suppers and were prevailed upon to accept trifling tokens of regard in the way of money for the cherries and supper. A drive home, around by Paris, in the calm twilight of a summer evening - or a little after twilight, possibly - with a stop at that place for a "sangaree" completed a cherry ride in our grandfathers' and grandmothers' days.

A sangaree, by the way, is something to drink, and was as common in those days as lemonade is in these. It was made of wine, water, nutmeg and sugar. It was quite the proper thing when out with young ladies to treat them with this pleasant beverage, and consequently the places of its preparation were no doubt held in the same dread by young men as is the soda water fountain of today.

Waterville Was Smaller Then

In the days of military balls, sangarees and cherry rides, Waterville was much smaller than now. There were only three or four stores and a great many less dwelling houses. The flat-iron plot which is now pointed with Mr. Finnegan's store and has the school buildings and Mr. E. Buell's residence on the opposite corners, was nearly an open field. The hotel, a building west of the bank, the house where Francis Terry lives, the old school buildings, the old Baptist Church and perhaps a few others were the only buildings. The old church stood back from the corner and nothing separated it from the former school buildings except a grave yard.

Noble Family Resided Here

About the year 1832 the house on the corner opposite the Baptist Church was occupied by a family that came from Utica during the cholera epidemic of that year. The family consisted of Madame Pardoe, her daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Everts. They had conducted a French school in Utica, but when the cholera broke out they left the city with so many others. A school was started at their residence here and kept up for several years.

Madame Pardoe had quite a history. She was born in France and was connected with some of the noble families. She was one of the bridesmaids of Marie Antoinette when the latter was married to Louis XVI. During the stormy times of the French revolution Madame Pardoe, who had become a widow, was obliged to flee from Paris and came to this country. As stated above, she went to Utica where her daughter married, and later all came here. Madame Pardoe lived only two years after coming here. On a very unimposing marble slab in our cemetery may be found this brief inscription: "In memory of Madame S. Pardoe, a native of France, who died October 24, 1834. Aged, 86 years."

Aaron Burr Once a Visitor

The same year of the cholera in Utica Aaron Burr passed through this village by stage, stopping for dinner at the Old American House. As he had killed his man - and one of the greatest men this country ever produced, too - he was regarded with a great deal of interest by our villagers. He seemed pleased with the attention given him. He walked about, chatting with different ones and -

At this point the interview was broken in upon and not resumed. The writing, however, continues:

In a later issue of the Reflex under the heading, "Madame Pardoe's Granddaughter," there appeared the following notice:

"The Reflex of January 19th, in which mention was made of Madame S. Pardoe, found its way to Mrs. Emma Everts Evans, a granddaughter of Mrs. Pardoe, living in Sausalito, California. In a letter requesting some extra copies, Mrs. Evans says: "An article in your paper alluding to Madame S. Pardoe (who was my grandmother) brings back to my memory many incidents in my grandmother's life in France, which were related to me by my mother, Mrs. Everts."

"It also calls to mind the time of the cholera in Utica and the haste with which we left the place - going away, as my mother afterwards told me, leaving the breakfast dishes and the silver on the table. I remember the tolling of the church bells at the time of the death of my grandmother as it struck out the years of her age - eighty-six. I was then a very little girl but it left a life-long impression."

"I remember mother mentioning in after years the names of some of the families in Waterville - the Bacons, Congers, Staffords, Towers - and many of whom I suppose have passed away. My father lies in the Utica cemetery and my mother is buried in Erie, Pa., and I am only 'waiting at life's west window' to join the loved ones gone before."

End of document.