

GRANDFATHER MIGRATES

(Mathews Harrington)

Father of Sally Harrington Morse

The father of my maternal grandfather, Mathews Harrington, following the fashion of his day, drank too often of the cup that cheers-- and likewise inebriates. Grandfather Mathews was a thrifty, industrious and ambitious lad, with one inborn longing to do and have and be something in the world. It was a small world as he knew it, covered for the most part with primeval forest, yet given over to the undesputed possession of the wild animals and the wilder men who roamed it fastnesses secure and unafraid.

When he was sixteen years of age his father "hired him out" to one of his pioneer - farmer neighbors. Grandfather spent much delectable thought, disposing of his first wages, in his mind, in advance of their receipt. He would buy a suit of clothes--probably homespun and home-sewed had been his only wear up till this time---- then he would buy some coveted possession for his mother. Alas! when he claimed his first wages his employer informed him that his father had already collected it. It was the last straw. He went home to his mother, poured out his grievances, told her how he had loved that suit of dream clothes, and that luxury (I wish I could record here what it was) that he had been going to lay in her lap, and vowed that no more of his earnings should go to the enrichment of the rum-seller. Mother-wise, she begged the fledgeling to stay a little longer in or at least near, the nest, and mother-wise, when ~~she~~ that the time had come when must use his wings, she made his flight as easy as she could. Together they gathered his meager possessions into a pitiful little bundle, in a bandana handkerchief and, armed with his mother's blessing, an axe, and a tiny hoard of money-- one, two or possibly three dollars, (it is so long since grandfather used to gather my sister and me around his knee and tell us these vital tales!)

he started out to make his way in the world. Somewhere on his way from Danby, Vermont, to what is now Cherry Hill, Erie County Pa., lay forty unbroken miles of virgin forest. Of course woods in smaller areas lay all along his route, but with some pioneer's tragic little clearing keeping him in touch with his kind at shorter intervals. About sundown on a day, he stopped to buy food and ask direction at a cabin that stood near the edge of the "big woods". The settler's wife, kind and hospitable as those are who carry civilization with axe and gun and plough into the world's far places, gave him valuable advice, along with the rude supplies needed. She told him that a man on horseback had entered the forest trail an hour or so earlier.

"Of course," she said, "It is not likely that you will overtake him, a little boy like you and him on a horse--but if he should be delayed for any reason, and you should catch up with him, be sure that you sing out long before you reach him, for he has a gun, and he looking for bears and Indians much more than for little boys."

Little Grandfather thanked her and pushed on, determined to overtake that man-- horse or no horse, and have company on his lonely journey. He was very agile and active though always small, and presently the friendly light of a campfire winked him a welcome, ahead. He began calling--- "OHO" Here comes a white man and a friend."

As he neared the fire, a delighted and astonished man came forward to welcome a tired and happy boy, and proceeded to share his comfortable blankets with the newcomer for the rest of the night. (I wonder was it moonlight, or were the white blazings on the trees distinguishable to his bright boy's eyes even in the dark. Poor eyes that went out in darkness, for grandfather was blind for so some years before his death. At any rate he was very much afraid of losing his way.

The horseman appears to have been a frank and friendly soul, for he soon

confided to grandfather that the contents of a buckskin bag which he carried on his saddle horn, was two hundred dollars in gold, his capital to begin life in the "new country", the "West" to which he was going (somewhere in western Pennsylvania or eastern Ohio) Such wealth as that two hundred dollars---gold! not pelts nor corn or wheat---was in the eyes of poor penniless little grandfather!

His delight and pride were unbounded, when, as the two proceeded on their journey, "riding and tying", the owner of this wealth entrusted it to his boy companion, stranger tho' he was, and allowed him the use of the horse and the custody of the money during an honest half of the journey. I do not know the name of this good friend en route. One would love to hunt up his descendants across the intervening century and a quarter for the human kindness rendered by their ancestor to the forlorn and lonely boy who was ours.

Arrived in the vicinity of Cherry Hill, grandfather began the process of hewing his fortune out of the wilderness with his trusty axe, always his chosen weapon, for he was never a hunter or a good marksman. Whenever a settler could afford to pay for help in clearing his land, there was grandfather Harrington with his axe, pitting the strength of his slender, wiry arms against that of the leaf-crowned monarchs of that primeval forest. With his earnings he bought land at (now) Cherry Hill, from one Huydekaper, who owned all the land thereabouts. (I wonder if he had it as a grant from the British Crown) Building himself a log cabin, the windows of which were glazed with hog blatter, he kept bachelor hall, cleared his land as he could, and brought it under cultivation, continuing as opportunity offered to clear land and chop wood for his neighbors, and to turn his earnings into land, at \$1.25 an acre, which he knew would enormously increase in value.

Sun and moon were his only timepieces. He began work when it was light

enough for him to use his axe and quit when neither sun nor moon shone upon his labors. Frugal by nature, he was so by necessity also. In those first years he raised no stock, and being a poor hunter he often became very meat hungry. Returning once from his work some miles distant, He passed an abandoned cabin in which had been left a barrel with some soap grease in it. Retreiving the best of this, mouldy ham bones and scraps of meat, he took them home washed and scraped them, boiled them and had a feast!!!

About the year 1804 he married Elizabeth Spry, sixteen-year old daughter of one of his employers. This grandmother Spry-Harrington, as I shall attempt to show in a later "Grandmother's) story, proved a fit helpmate for grandfather, and although eugenics had never been thought of then, a worthy ancestress--both physically and mentally-- for his numerous descendants, being a tall women of magnificent physique---to offset his lack of statue-- and having a mind to match her vigorous body. At the time of this marriage, grandfather must have been about 26 years old.

It goes without saying that he prospered financially, and became a man of weight in the community. Always economical, industrious and thrifty, his frugality was beautifully counterbalanced by a tender-hearted generosity-- a somewhat rare combination of qualities. Mathews Harrington would not willingly waste one cent, had he lost one he would doubtless searched for it dilligently. But he made nothing of givin a cow or a season's food supplies to the family of a sick or unfortunate neighbor; and his latch string was always out for the wayfarer, the needy and the helpless.

His five sons and five daughters all lived to maturity, and after the death of his mother, he drove to Danby, Vermont-- a long and tedious trip, to bring his father home to Penna.

The old man proved irritable and difficult, and it was found expedient to build him a cabin of his own near grandfather's. One of his diversions

was making and cultivation of a little garden of his special own. But the chickens raided it now and then, and on those occasions there was a special brand of trouble in camp. It speaks volumes about the character of grandmother, that she handled these delicate situations comfortably. When great grandfather came fuming, "Betsey, them pesky chickens have been at my sweet corn again. I'll kill 'em, I swear I'll wring their blamed necks!!" she was all sympathy and compliance. "It is a shame, father," she would say, "Kill them, I hope you will. They deserve to have their necks wrung" ---- and the incident was closed--till the next time. Poor, mythical, bibulous great-grandfather, away back there in the dimness of the eighteenth century! Doubtless you were a good enough fellow when John Barleycorn let you Alone! One wonders what you felt in the last years when your declining pathway was so sedulously smoothed by the filial tenderness of the son to whom you had been such an inadequate father. This great-grandfather Israel Harrington, was a soldier in the Revolution, enlisting and serving from Rhode Island.

Note: My sister Mollie reminds me that there could have been no "store clothes" accessible to grandfather in Vermont, and that therefore it must have been homespun cloth for a suit that he planned to buy.

Note: Great grandfather Israel may possibly have moved to New York and it may have been to New York that grandfather drove for him, but I think it was to Vermont. In Virginia, where I write, I have no one but Mollie to help out my memory.

*****ADDENDA*****

After grandmother's death my grandfather lived with his children, spending a certain given time with each in alternation. But at the last, grown very feeble, he elected to spend all his time with his two daughters in Penna. (Aunt Sally Morse lived in Ohio)

It fell then to my sister, Mollie, then about sixteen, to lead him about

and wait on him. In seating himself at the dinner table one day, he somehow bumped his head on the edge of it. Startled and distressed, my gentle father, for once spoke sharply, rebuking Mollie for carelessness. Grandfather flung up his bald head and fixed my father with a sightless eye.

"William", he said, "If you will attend to your own business, I can look after mine! Don't you suppose this child feels bad enough without being scolded? It wasn't her fault any how."

But though he dealt with William somewhat summarily on this occasion, my grandfather was fond of my father, and sometimes held him up as a model of filial dutifulness to his own sons.

"William", he would say, "Always follows my advise abouthis[#]farming". Evidently if he didn't, William did not find it necessary to advertise the fact to grandfather.

Both men were ardently interested in the great political and social questions, which, in the late fifties, began to disrupt the North from the South. My father was born in 1810, and being past the age for compulsory military service, felt his nearest duty to lie at home caring for his houseful of girls on the small Pennsylvania farm which at best, yeilded a none too lavish living for our many feminine mouths, but he was passionately, and I am sure, prayerfully an abolitionist, a republican and a unionest, and my grandfather was no less so. As the presidential election drew near he said: "If I am alive I am going to vote for Honest Abe, If I cannot sit up, you must put some straw in the wagon and haul me to the polls on that." He was able however to ride in a buggy and lived to see the Civil War some two years old.

When Morgan raided Pennsylvania threatening to water his horses in Lake Erie my father enlisted and was in camp (perhaps near Pittsburgh)

for a few days but saw no Morgan and no service.

(Granddaughter, take notice! The revolutionary service of Great Grand-father Israel Harrington from Rhode Island, qualifies you all for membership in the D.A.R.