

"How our forefathers lived"

The subject given, would seem not to be very definite, in regard to time or manner, though not directly traceable, our ancestry is supposed to go back in a continuous line until it reaches the first man Adam, whom we all believe to have been created by the omnipotence of God.

I presume the intent of the author of the subject, was to consider the lives, of those whites, who first inhabited the wilds of Western New York, and from whom a portion of the present generation, are immediately descended, How did they live? Even this may be treated in different ways, as; how did they subsist, what were their employments, what their moral status, &c.

Let us consider for a little who they were, History says, the "Genesee country" was first settled, mainly by people from the New England States, and they in great part, were the progeny of citizens of Old England a people who were imbued with great self-reliance; who felt that under God's guidance they were able to care for their material wants; who for various reasons, sought new homes in the wilds of America; who braved

the dangers of sea and land, and the vicissitudes of the seasons, that they might the better carry out their own ideas of right and wrong, and who through their great perseverance, accomplished their ends.

From such parentage, what could be expected, but a race of honest, resolute, God-fearing people. Such I believe to have been the early settlers of Western New York,

Like their progenitors, having a desire to better their condition, they left homes in New England, travelling toward the setting sun, into the dense forests of New York, hewing as they came a pathway for their faithful beasts, bringing with them such means of sustenance and seed, as their immediate needs required, and consuming days of hard labor and nights of fatigue in their journey. It was usually undertaken in the winter season, using runners instead of wheels on their vehicles, and for their first resting place after arrival, the upturned sleigh, to shield them from the storms,

Their first needs were better abodes, but the material therefor, being all about them in great profusion, it required only a little tact, with the sturdy blows of the

wood-man to erect, and a comfortable log cabin, ~~which is~~ the first sign of civilization in a wooded country, was soon ready for occupation. The fertile soil, being covered with a dense growth of trees, their early removal was a necessity, before the seed for their harvest could be planted, and the resounding strokes of the woodman's axe, which is the pioneer's first implement, soon startled the native denizens, causing them to stare at the intruders into their domains. I have heard described by pioneers, some of the methods, of freeing the land from timber. They make their blows to count, as far as possible, by cutting a series, or row of trees partially asunder and when all was ranged, felling a giant, which in its downward course, struck a weakened one, breaking it and its neighbors, and so on through the series, forming what they termed a wind-row of fallen trees, and making a goodly swath through the forest. After sufficient drying of the wind-row, fire was applied, which removed the smaller parts, then came the logging of the residue into immense heaps when fire again became their servant.

A portion of the ashes, thus produced, were leached, the lye boiled, producing a crude potash, or as was termed by them "Black Salts", and I have often heard them repeat that "Black Salts" was the only commodity, that would bring money.

It was necessary that the seed should be covered with earth to germinate, and this was often accomplished, by striking the axe, into the ground among the roots, dropping the seed, ^{and} covering in any manner most convenient;

Maize or Indian corn being an indigenous plant, was largely used ^{as food} by the early settlers, requiring but about ninety days, from the planting of the seed, until the grain is edible.

From it many ^{of} the some varieties of bread were manufactured, by our ancestors. Beans which require but a short period for growth, and which were considered very ^{nutritious} ~~sustaining~~, were also much used. A proper mixture of corn and beans, rightly cooked, which some of the present age consider delicious was not scorned by them. For meats, the forests produced a great variety of animals and birds, which the true aim of the marksman, with his trusty flint-lock, could bring down as necessity required; while the brooks and

streams abounded with fish, which only required a little craft, to bring from their nativity element, to the frying pan.

Their food was of the purest quality which nature could furnish, plainly cooked, and that with a free circulation of ~~the~~ air, they were remarkably free from sickness, and therefore doctors were needed but seldom. The pioneer was compelled to be economical, for if his scanty hoard of sustenance became exhausted, before his harvest-time, it meant a long and weary tramp to older settlements for replenishment.

The earliest settlers, were mainly agriculturists, or Patrons as well as patterns of Husbandry, for they had Faith that God would keep them through their rough trials; they nurtured the Hope, that the path before them would become less rugged; they dispensed Charity, with a hand consoled with their possessions, and were noted for the Fidelity with which they kept their promises with neighbors. They drank from the Springs that issued forth from the hills, and as a substitute for coffee, roasted corn, or ^{certain} available roots, were steeped, making a very palatable, and wholesome beverage.

They were not as a rule, total abstainers from spirituous liquors, but considered Paul's advice to Timothy, to be an excellent thing, Happily however, after seeing the evil effects, which a too free use of alcoholic drinks, ^{had} ~~produced~~, many of them became staunch ^{and} ~~total~~ ^{total}.

Their clothing was manufactured, from wool from the Sheep, carded, spun & woven at their own fire sides, as also from the fiber of the flax plant, the Mothers and daughters buying themselves with those things, while the fathers and sons were felling the trees, to increase the acreage, of tillage, or improving that which had already been cleared, or cutting paths, whereby their travel from one to the other should be shortened or made more convenient,

That they were industrious, is shown by the gradual improvement of the country for agricultural purposes, by the better accommodations in shelter, for themselves and their animals, Their meeting together at each others homes on the Sabbath, for purposes of worship, showed that they revered that Infinite being who controlled their needs, and the reverent silence or uttered invocation, preceding their

meals, was an acknowledgement, of the many mercies and blessings vouchsafed.

As the population increased, either by migration, or by birth, and the clearings of the forest were spread out, other vocations became necessary, the artisan to fashion and make their implements; the miller to grind their grain; the merchant, to facilitate the exchange of one product for another; the teacher to train the mind, and the parson to attend their spiritual needs. The lawyer found but little use for his trade among them, for they were kindly disposed, one toward another, and if by chance a misunderstanding occurred, the matter, was usually left for mutual friends to arbitrate.

The log school-house was an early indication that they considered the minds of the young needed proper tutoring, and the erection of buildings set apart for worship, that they did not forget the Fountain from which they drew their strength.

By industry, frugality and brotherly kindness they were enabled to improve and increase their belongings, until Western New York became, and has long been counted, as one of the most desirable portions, of Free America.

Miller fm. and acad. before the Madison Grange, no 32-C.
Patrons of Husbandry, Oct. 22nd 1897