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Grandmother Sanders' Autobiography

Grandchildren:

(Mrs.) Alice Sanders Reed
Homestead, Fla.

Richard A. Sanders
Decatur, Georgia

Son:

Ernest A. Sanders
Candler, N.C.

(written for the New Century Club)

I have always had great admiration for the ability displayed by our Year Book Committee, but this time I fear that with respect to at least one member they must have been influenced by the "repression or sumpin' ". To expect a commonplace old lady who has led a commonplace life to tell something of interest to this Club is to set an almost impossible task. If I were a Mussolini, or a McAdoo, or even a Sarah Joseph Hale, I might have something worthwhile to tell, but as it is I fear you made a bad mistake. You did not even give me a big heading! If you had said "Great Grandmother Sanders' Eighty Years" the title might have redeemed the paper. But just "My Autobiography"? Dear girls,--- why did you do it? However to misquote Tennyson:

Mine not to make reply,

Mine but to do or be fined.

So here you have the "short and simple annals of the poor":

Let me see, do not biographers usually introduce their annals by remarking that their famous personage was born of poor but honest parents? Well, I was too. My father was a New York state carpenter and cabinet maker. My mother was a Connecticut school teacher. My father was twice married. ~~Three~~ children were born to his first wife and three to my mother; all except myself, the youngest, were New Yorkers. I came, I guess, as rather a delayed blessing, after my parents had emigrated in about 1848 to what was then far-off Ohio. ~~It~~ was then a long tiresome journey of some weeks. I remember my mother telling one incident of the trip. She said as they were staying one night at a hotel in Pennsylvania, she saw a thrifty plant with dark green leaves and beautiful ~~rosy~~ fruit growing in the garden. She told the landlady she thought it so attractive. To which the landlady replied, "Yes, it is pretty but very poisonous, be careful not to touch it." It was a tomato.

There, too, she made the acquaintance of apple butter, something unknown of in the East at that time. My people lived for a time in Cuyahoga Falls where they had relatives and where I was born in about the middle of the last century. For some years my father had felt a call to the ministry; his friends urged him to heed the call. He did so and entered the ministry of the U.B. church, where he was an active and honored worker until failing health forced him into retirement, in 1882.

In those early years Ohio was but a lusty youngster in the sisterhood of states. Rural Ohio was especially in the pioneer period of the professions and the ministry was like other callings. Stations were few, circuits of from three to six or eight appointments, so many ministers made one town their home from which they would go out each week to their various appointments. Following this custom, my father moved to a little town called Burbank, 13 miles north of Wooster where, with a few absences, my people lived during my father's active life. This place I counted home until I married.

I wish I were an artist to paint you a pen picture of the hamlet, for it would be in substance a picture of the many little villages in rural Ohio at that time. Shut your eyes and in imagination see a cluster of houses, mostly frame (for the little log cabin was going out about that time), I presume the enterprising villagers thought a log house as antiquated as we would an 1890 Ford. These houses were largely one and one half stories, of the shoe-box type, and containing from four to six rooms with shuttered windows and a stoop shielding the front door entrance. There were no bathrooms, no gas, no electric light, no furnace heat. But the rooms were large and light, well heated with wood fires and sweet with the odor of drying herbs, strings of apples and peaches and big chunks of beef drying around the stove pipe. And the cellar stored not coal, but barrels of potatoes, apples and cider with jars and jars of delicious preserves and butters, (you know canned fruit was unknown then), and so many things which made a little girl's mouth water when she was allowed to get a glimpse of the richness.

The people lived close to the good earth and Mother Nature gave them with a lavish hand. Large gardens with never a corn worm or cucumber beetle, fruit trees with no bug or blight to harm them called you to their abundance and the full dinner pail was an actual reality to everyone. But should crops fail or should sickness come to a family, his neighbors would see that his wants were really and amply supplied.

Our village had two streets running East and West, cut by two running North and South, very much like the two bisections on which we used to play Fox and Geese. These streets were worked each spring by men hired for the purpose or by men who wished to work out their poll tax and so avoid the payment of two dollars into the public fund. If we had what we call an open winter, the mud was almost bottomless; in the hot summer the dust was almost as deep. But, oh, how good that cool dust did feel to hot bare little feet running to school! On the most important of these streets was the village store where, like Moby's, one could buy anything---but not quite in the same variety or importance. Calicos, gingham, flannel cloth, boots (men did not wear shoes in those days), straw hats, plug tobacco and snuff and the like, with a few jars of striped stick candy, filled the shelves back of the counter while a barrel of crackers, another of salt fish and a big barrel stove occupied much of the floor space of the front room. Back of that was a smaller room where were stored barrels of white and brown sugar, the white of the sugar loaf variety; barrels of salt and rice, boxes of raisins; eggs, butter and vegetables taken in barter, and small articles of hardware.

For more important purchases we had to go to Wooster, then a thriving town of eight or nine thousand people. But the thirteen long miles intervening made a great barrier between us and the city, as we called it, and the villagers largely contented themselves with what they could buy at home. Besides, much of the trade, especially with the farmer folk, was by barter; the farmer would bring in butter, eggs, and vegetables, skins of animals and the like, and exchange them for drygoods or things we did not raise on the farm. For instance, one farmer brought in a barrel of maple sugar and exchanged it for white.

A little farther down the street was the blacksmith shop like Longfellow's, and the tavern where the occasional traveler found rest. Down a side street was a tannery, which smelled to heaven, and on the other side of the street, an ashery. On the bank of the Kilbuck River, a little farther to the west, a busy grist mill changed the owner's wheat and corn into flour and meal, charging not money, but a tenth of the grist in payment. The other and somewhat less public street must have been intended for the "literati" for our school house, and two churches were situated there. The school house, a small one-room building, rectangular in shape, had four rows of seats, two on either side of the center aisle. There was a small platform in the rear on which the teacher's desk and chair stood. The only ornaments in the room were a little blackboard and a rod which usually hung on the wall behind the desks as a warning to evildoers. A narrow vestibule had hooks for wraps and a water pail and dipper. On the left hand side of the room the girls were seated, the boys on the right, and it was one of the teacher's favorite punishments to move a naughty pupil across the aisle. We girls felt quite disgraced to be made to sit with the boys and vice versa.

You who are or have been public school teachers, please imagine yourselves before from 40 to 60 girls and boys, aged eight to fifteen, trying to interest and keep them busy from 9 to 12 and from 1 to 4, five days of the week---the half day on Saturday thrown in for good measure. No music, no drawing, no calisthenics, no maps,-- a heterogeneous collection of texts, many of them handed down from an older brother or sister. It was as I once heard a friend say--- a Herculean task. Whispering was taboo, and the only sound heard in the well-regulated schoolroom was the voices of the class called to the front to recite and the wriggling of restless little bodies studying their lessons in their seats.

Sometimes a hand raised and the request, "Please, teacher, may I get a drink," or "Please, may I go out?"---with an occasional soft snore from some little tot fallen asleep in her seat, broke the routine.

Did any of you ever toe the mark to read or spell and do you remember the feeling of pride when you stood at the head of the class? No, I'm sure you have not, but I assure you it was equal to getting an A plus. Such was the road to learning that your grandparents trod. Cruel and rough, you may say, and so it was, but somehow great men and women came along that path. And it was not all work: the long recesses in the forenoon and afternoon were happy playtimes when the air rang with shouts of Andyover and Blackman, while younger children played Ring around the Rosy or London Bridge. Happy, innocent childhood! Happy, harmless games!

Across the street from the schoolhouse stood the Methodist church, enclosed by a fence with hitching posts on three sides. The U.B. Building was a little farther down the street. They were much alike and a description of one will fit the other. Both were frame, rectangular, with a little belfry on the roof and three windows on each side for light and ventilation. The pulpit was at the rear of the room, surrounded by an altar rail or "mourner's bench" as it used to be called. On either side of the pulpit were two pews called the

"Amen Corner" and usually occupied by the older and more pious members. The center of the room was filled with long pews, divided in the middle by a wooden partition. Shorter pews filled the sides, leaving an aisle between the side and the center aisles. On the walls were little wooden sconces holding the candles with which the church was lighted, while a big Bible and brass candle sticks adorned the pulpit. I forgot to state that the school-house held a big wood-burning stove, and the church was similarly arranged. As in the school room the sexes were separated, the men on the right and the women on the left of the middle partition. The only time the rule was changed was when a bride and groom made their "appearance", as it was called, on the first Sabbath after their marriage. There was, too, a custom that parents with young children could sit on either side of the partition, so the youngsters could be handed over from one parent to the other. There were no musical instruments and few hymn books. The minister would "line" the hymn, two stanzas at a time, and someone in the congregation would "raise" the tune and ah, how they could sing!

The quarterly meetings were great occasions where members came from all over the Circuit, communion was observed and often conversions were made. Our two churches alternated the morning services because neither pastor could meet all his members each week, but each church usually had a service Sunday evening at early candle lighting.

But life was not all work or worship. To be sure we had no radio, no movies, no autos, and in our town no card playing or dancing. But there were quilting bees, apple parings, corn huskings, spelling matches, and sleighrides. Our homes were furnished very simply. There was only one piano in the town; one woman was the very proud owner of a sewing machine (worked by hand); another family had what we call a "store carpet". Few papers or magazines came to the village and many of our people had not a book in their home except a Bible, Case Almanac, and the children's school books. But the homes were kindly homes, God-fearing and neighbor-loving; homes from which the voice of worship went up to the Father, morning and evening. I can see as though it was yesterday, our little family--father, mother, sisters, brothers, and the little curly-haired, wistful-eyed girl sitting by father's side where he could help me with the hard words as we read the Scripture and knelt in prayer. How I pity the child who has no such memories.

But times were changing; war clouds were gathering on our country's horizon, the burning questions of slavery and secession were in the air. Fathers and mothers went about with anxious faces and even the little children sensed some trouble ahead.

The Presidential campaign was an exciting one: like our present struggles, the two parties fought bitterly. Companies of men called Wide Awakes were formed in many states to arouse enthusiasm in political meetings and indeed they were a brave sight as they marched with bands playing and flags flying. Then followed Lincoln's election, the South's secession, and four years of war and heart-ache. Fathers eagerly scanned the weekly papers, (we had no dailies) fearing to find the names of their sons among the killed or wounded. Mothers forgot usual tasks while they prepared food, knit stockings and made bandages to send to their boys on the field. One of my vivid

memories of that time was of going with my girl friends, each day after school, to the church where we scraped lint and tore bandages. At length came word that peace was declared, hard followed by the stunning news that Father Abraham, loved by men, women, and children, had been shot. The nation mourned, not only a President, but also a father. As I think of that time now, it seems some terrible nightmare.

Then came the period of expansion which usually follows victorious wars. Candles were superseded by kerosene; the ox-cart by the railroad; and our little town began to stretch itself, to grasp some of the new ideas and ideals of the older states. We even had an Academy which flourished for a few years. The most interesting event in its history to me was that in a Latin class there I first met the young man with whom I later learned to conjugate the verb "Amo.". We then had no highschool outside the cities and those Academies filled a very real need for those young people who aspired to more than a common school education, but had not the means to go to college. One such school, situated in Smithville, a village not far from Wooster, was a really good school of from 200 to 300 pupils. Its faculty were college men. Greek, Latin, German, higher Math, History and some Science, besides the usual academic studies, were well taught there. Here I spent three busy, happy years, stopping between times to teach long enough to earn money for another year of study. In 1876 I realized a long cherished dream and entered Otterbein.

I wish you could vision Westerville and Otterbein as they were then. A little village of some 400 or 500 people with no paved streets or street lights, no sewage, no gas or water systems. And Otterbein with but two buildings, one of them a girls' dormitory. A faculty of six, five men and one woman, and a roster of 203 students, over 100 of whom were in the Preparatory Dept. There were no Christian Assns., no athletics, no social or study clubs, and in fact no extracurricular activities except four flourishing Literary Societies, resembling oratorical and debating societies. There was also a students' prayer meeting and a fine lecture course where people like Wendell Phillips, Elizabeth Katy Stanton, and Fred Douglas appeared.

I would not have you think that our small faculty lacked mental powers or ability to teach; I shall always hold those teachers in reverence, not only for their knowledge but for themselves. Coming in late in the college course, I was compelled to run the intellectual gauntlet. It was not an easy one but the fates and the faculty were kind to me and I was admitted to graduate with class of 1877.

Then followed a year of teaching while waiting for my lover to graduate, then marriage and thirteen happy years as the wife of a public school teacher in Ohio and in Indiana. In the meantime, God gave us a son to make our home complete. Then came the last change when Mr. Sanders was called to the presidency of his old college. We have spent nearly 42 years here. Some days were dark, but only enough to temper the sunshine. Mine has been a long, happy life which has seen many changes: from the log cabin with its blazing back-logs to the steam-heated apartment house; from the horse and carriage to the airplane; from the tallow dip to the electric light; from pantalets and woollen petticoats to bathing suits and silks; from the one-room schoolhouse and ABC method to the centralized school with its multiplied courses. Time and words fail me to tell all the changes, some good, some bad, which my years have seen. I said when I began this chronicle that my life had been a commonplace life. Personally, that is true, but it has witnessed wonderful things. It has been a happy life and I hope of some use, rich in blessed memories and loving friends, among whom I count gratefully the New Century Club.