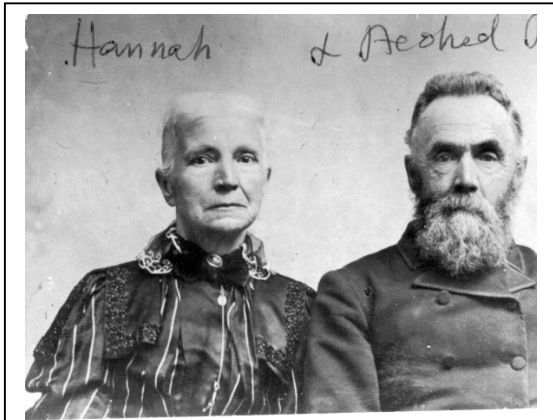


When My Grandmother was a Little Girl.

(By Ruth A. Prentiss, 1909, age 13, West Brattleboro, VT)

(Ruth was a younger sister of Helen Prentiss Smith)



**Hannah Silsbee Johnson Prentiss & Husband,
Asahel: Circa 1900**

Away up in the wilds of Maine, in the town of Lincoln, on the Penobscot River, my grandmother (Hannah Silsbee Johnson) was born, January 2, 1833. She was the seventh in a family of 13 children and consequently was kept busy tending her brothers and sisters. Her father was employed by the government to survey new towns and so lived far away from anyone save for a few wandering tribes of Indians that sometimes visited the cabin. These Indians came from the north and the families had a great terror of them, especially my grandma's mother, as she was left alone a large part of the time when her husband was away surveying.

The house in which they lived was a common two-roomed log cabin with a loft overhead where the children slept. The larger room was the living room, with its large fireplace and huge brick oven, the other room being the sleeping room of the parents and youngest children.

One day the mother was obliged to leave home, and Asa, the oldest boy, was told to put the children to bed and stay to rock the baby. When bedtime came he put his younger brothers -- Samuel, Erastus, Henry and Nathan, and his sister Keziah to bed and succeeded in getting baby

Hannah, my grandmother, asleep. He put her in the cradle and rocked her for a while, but it was lonely down there alone. He struck upon a fine idea and put it into execution before his mother came home. When she arrived the cradle was quietly rocking, but no boy was to be seen. On investigating the matter she found that Asa had tied a string to the rocker, had drawn it up through the loose logs of the floor and was leisurely pulling the string as he lay in bed.

The mother and father were very religious and no matter how far church was from home, babies and all went whenever possible. At this time it was nine miles away, and in the summer the father would row them to church down the river, while in the winter he would skate, drawing the family on a large hand-sled. After the father had worked hard all the week and then taken the family to church he was tired and apt to be sleepy, and rather than go to sleep he would sometimes stand during most of the service.

It was not always an easy matter to provide food for the family, and especially one year when a hard frost came in August, killing all the crops, so all the provisions they had were a few small potatoes about the size of a hen's egg. Before winter set in their scanty store was almost exhausted and what to do they did not know. They prayed earnestly about the matter, and not long after a team was seen coming through the opening. It was the first wagon that had ever come to the house. The team drove up to the cabin and inquired where Mr. Cyrus Johnson lived, to which the father replied, "He lives here." Then the man told them that the load was for them, and the father said that there must be some mistake as he had sent for no goods. It finally proved that his brother, who had heard of their condition, had sent these provisions -- flour, whole cheeses, meat, etc., from his store in Bangor. After the things had been unloaded and the team driven away the father said, "Before we eat, let us have a prayer of thanksgiving." While the family were kneeling, Erastus, a small boy of four or five, proved to be too near one of the cheeses, for it was found, after the prayer, that a cheese had been nibbled, and when the mother inquired about it, Erastus doubtfully replied, "I guess a mouse did it."

The next summer the father gave up working for the government and bought a farm nearer the settlement, moving there as soon as he could make plans. As they were moving to their new home they discovered that the baby was missing and on looking about found that it had rolled off of the load a little way back and was unhurt.

Their new home was near a school-house, and part of the time the teacher boarded with them. One of the earliest recollections of my grandmother was when she went to school for the first time, at the age of two and a half years. After going half a day she grew homesick and one of her brothers carried her home on his back. As they entered the house her grandfather said, "Hannah, have you finished your education?" to which she replied, "Yes, sir." After the first day she went regularly through the whole term, the teacher giving her a nap every afternoon in a bed made up on one of the desks.

Many of the luxuries of today were not enjoyed in the younger days of my grandmother. There were no stores near and everything was home-made.

One time candles were getting low, meat was scarce and mittens were needed for the coming winter. The father selected the fattest sheep of the flock and killed it, getting 20 pounds of tallow for candles, meat for the winter and wool for the mittens.

My grandma's mother generally set apart a few days in the fall for making a year's supply of candles. The tallow was tried out in large kettles one day and the next day it was put into two kettles and hung alternately in the fireplace, the one replacing the other when the tallow began to cool. She attached a few lengths of candle wicking to each stick and laid them crosswise on a couple of long poles placed between two chairs. Each rod of wicks was dipped into the kettle of hot tallow and taken back to their place between the chairs. They were dipped until the desired size was reached.

The wool was spun into yarn and the girls of the family knit it into stockings and mittens.

My grandmother's stint, at the age of 10, was to spin a certain amount of yarn and sometimes knit a pair of mittens each day. She was allowed to go visiting Saturday if she could knit six pairs in five days, which she did occasionally.

The bears were very plentiful at this place and destroyed much of the crops. Once the father brought back before breakfast three bears which he had killed.

The boys of the family had a great love and talent for music but they had no musical instrument and money was scarce. They made a bass viol and earned money for a violin by burning charcoal in a charcoal pit in the woods at night, and many happy hours were spent with the instruments thus secured.

You can see by my story that although the children of long ago worked hard and were deprived of what we call necessities, they were just as happy and enjoyed just as many good times as we today.