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Schooner Days MCVIII (1108)
By C.H.J. Snider

Happier Bride's Diary - Paradise After Purgatory

"We arrived at Utica at 3 o'clock," continues Mrs. Anne MacDonell's diary of her long journey from Etobicoke to see her parents in Long Island, N.Y.. She had been away from them for five years, and had been married now five months to Col. The Hon. Alexander MacDonnell, High Sheriff of the Home District in Upper Canada.

The entry of June 13, 1805, records her relief at approaching evidence of civilization in her wilderness journey after the horror and hardships of Wood Creek.

"We passed through 5 locks and several canals cut for a mile or two in length, very beautiful, and arrived at Rome, about sundown, 20 miles. It was a hard day's work for our men, tho' they had got an extra hand, but now the worst of our journey was over, and I was quite delighted with the appearance of the town.

"After passing through such a wilderness nothing could be more pleasing than this habitable world. We had seen for some days nothing more to admire but the tall pine, the branching elm and hemlock, and a few other favorite trees. They did indeed excite my wonder. I viewed with astonishment the wild uncultivated nature.

"We were shown to Mr. Stark's Tavern, and on Wood Creek we should have thought our accommodation quite superb, but in this town we did not think so much of it, but I slept charmingly. It was, indeed, the greatest luxury I could meet - a good bed. Mr. McLean indulged me to sleep till eight o'clock. Indeed it has become absolutely necessary I should take a little rest. I was quite refreshed but slept too late to walk around the town to examine its beauties, so left there at 10 o'clock. We passed through another lock, and then we were on the Mohawk River, now went down with the current, which pleased us much. We arrived at Utica at 3 o'clock."

Utica

The original Utica was a city in Africa, in the present Tunis, 25 miles northwest of ancient Carthage. Phoenicians founded it in 1101 BC. After the destruction of Carthage, BC 146, Utica became the capital of the Roman province and the first city of Africa.

Simcoe, with sturdy British prejudice, gave English names to every creek and hamlet in Upper Canada. Some new fledged republican with sturdy classical prejudice spattered New York state with Greek, Latin and Scriptural names. Hence the Utica, N.Y., which Anne described rather "charming" in the diary.

"'Tis quite an extensive town and improving very fast," wrote Mrs. MacDonell. "A vast deal of business going on and improved astonishingly since I passed 5 years ago. It cannot indeed do otherwise, being a place always passed by all going by land and water.

“We dined at the hotel (a fine building) at 3 o’clock, but could not get accommodation for the night, the house being mostly taken up by Governor Hull and his family on their way to Detroit. We were therefore obliged to proceed, and went a few miles and stopped at a house not unlike the Wood Creek houses, tho’ some distance from the river, for here they build on the road instead of the river. We laid our beds on the floor, slept ill, the house bad and horribly dirty. We could not perhaps have picked a worse on the whole river. So much for being strangers.”

12 Foot Niagara

“June 15th - We breakfasted 15 miles from Utica, at Parsons’ Tavern, a good one considering it was a Dutch house. Twelve miles (more) and came to Little Falls at 3 o’clock, just before a thunder shower. Went to Mr. Alexander’s, friends of Mrs. McGill’s. They were very polite. It was rainy and Mrs. A. Prevailed on us to stay the night. We walked around the place and to some famous mills, then to a blacksmith’s shop, where the hammers and bellows went by water. It was new to us.

“This village is very romantic, surrounded by mountains and locks, the river rushing through the midst. The falls are about 12 feet. They really deserve the name of Little, tho’ they make a great noise. It is indeed a rough looking place, but it would afford me pleasure to be here a day or two to climb some of them.

“June 16th - After breakfast at 7 o’clock we left Mr. Alexander’s and passed through several locks and canals. At 2 o’clock we stopped at a tavern but dined from our own baskets, during which there was a squall, which made us rather late in getting to Mr. Pride’s tavern where we had been recommended. A good house, nice beds, slept charmingly is something that I could not now do otherwise than be better.”

Another Claim

To interpolate irrelevantly if not impertinently, Utica, N.Y. had another, if not equally good, claim to fame. Not only did Governor Hull pass through here on his way to Detroit (which he surrendered to Brock’s brilliant strategy in 1812) - but in 1890 Utica was linked rather tenuously it is true, with Schooner Days’ first steps towards the profession, calling, or job of journalism.

In that year this writer succeeded to the agency for the Utica Saturday Globe in Kleinburg, Ont., heretofore held by Walter Nicholls, a schoolmate in SS No. 17, otherwise Kleinburg Public School.

Said agency netted as much as 24 cents a week if the agent could induce the villagers to buy all twelve of the dozen Utica Saturday Globes mailed from New York State weekly.

The Utica Saturday Globe was the first calendered paper in our journalistic experience, and printed half tones or at least very good engravings “just like photographs,” to the amazement of the village. But the real price, 5 cents a copy, was almost prohibitive in Kleinburg, where we could not afford butter when it went to 15 cents a pound. So the agency closed its doors and we

followed Walter Nicholls to the big city, Toronto. We found him a prosperous news butcher at the old Union Depot at the foot of Simcoe street. He was always a good salesman.

We have long cherished a platonic interest therefore in Utica, N.Y., and wish both Uticas well. And we think it served Hull right that he lost his shirt at Detroit, seven years after crowding the fair and travel tried Anne out of "the" hotel in Utica.