

ISCHUA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1832 FRANKLINVILLE LETTER

Recently I acquired a letter written by Clarinda Newton on September 24, 1832. She was living in Franklinville and the letter was sent to her sister Mrs. William Riggs in Monroe, Michigan.

Clarinda relates a family tragedy with these words: "we have been blessed with three lovely children, the youngest is no more, God has been pleased to take from us our lovely babe. He always had a very delicate constitution and had one fit of sickness after another until last spring. He was taken down with the measles and was very sick a number of days when the inflammation settled on his lungs and he expired the second day of May. Yes dear sister he has gone no more to return to his mother's fond embrace."

She talks about being afflicted with a liver ailment. She attributes her recovery to the salvation she has found in the Baptist Meeting House. That afternoon she was able to walk forty rods to the Meeting House where they had a protracted meeting that lasted six days. She also says that between 20 and 30 came forward to the anxious seat to be prayed for. She talks about a great revival for all the religious denominations in Franklinville.

Clarinda had visited her father who was ailing and she worried about his embrace of the principals of universalism. She is concerned about her sister's Episcopalian beliefs.

She left in the family carriage with her brother-in-law to visit her father. Otis Newton then went on to Vermont. She returned home by stagecoach and was injured when the coach overturned in Geneseo.

Her husband Isaac was building a large store this fall and planned to keep it during the winter.

The year before she and Isaac had traveled to Buffalo and Niagara Falls. Later a Mr. Phelps told them that if her husband could go to Michigan, Mr. Riggs would let his wife return to Franklinville to visit with Clarinda. They discovered this too late and Clarinda felt badly about missing this information, because they could have gone up the lake to Michigan.

Clarinda is hopeful that her brother-in-law will sell out in Michigan and return to New York so they can be closer.

The Newtons have also had fourteen family members visiting them for several weeks and Clarinda is a bit overwhelmed with work.

She names her remaining children as William and Annelisa. Both children attended school all summer and her daughter can read in many books and William can do easy reading.

She finds that she has to close her letter because she is not supposed to do anything with her right arm. This is probably because of the injuries from the stagecoach accident.

The letter led me to investigate some of the clues in the contents to discover more things about life in Franklinville in the 1830s.

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Clarinda talks about a revival in all the churches in the area. During this period of time, Western New York was besieged by a cholera epidemic.

Cholera is a disease caused by bacteria that settle in the small intestine. Today the disease is treatable. Basically, fluids are necessary to prevent dehydration. However, this was not known then and many infected people died within a short period of time. It began in Europe in 1831 and came across the Atlantic Ocean with immigrants. The disease was carried along the canal routes and hundreds of people lost their lives. New York City as well as Buffalo were hit. City residents fled to the countryside sometimes bringing this scourge with them. Cholera brought panic. During times of fear, people often turn to religion for consolation. This might explain the growth of fervor and an increase in church membership. The epidemic in Western New York lasted from July 1832 until December of that year. Then it suddenly disappeared.

Ida Gardner checked with Ministers of the Baptist Church and we learned that a protracted meeting is one that lasts over a number of days. It could be a revival or a convention. Clarinda mentions that this was the second protracted meeting so the epidemic might have resulted in an increase in church services.

An anxious seat or bench was reserved at a meeting for those troubled by conscience and eager for spiritual help. It was usually located down front.

The cemetery records for the South Main Street Burial Ground tell us that the child lost to measles was Norman Newton. His father Isaac died in 1849 and was buried there also. This cemetery was moved to Mount Prospect Cemetery.

The Census records give us additional information on the Newton family.

Isaac is first found in the 1830 Census in Franklinville. Very little information can be found there. It's the same for 1840. By the 1850 Census Isaac is gone so we don't know where he was born.

Clarinda is calling herself Clara. Annelisa is called Anne. Clarinda has given birth to two more children – Charles and John. Her son William is listed as a grocer. Perhaps this is Isaac's original store.

By 1860, William has disappeared. Anne is married to John Dyer, an artist from Massachusetts. Clarinda, despite her ill health in her younger years, is still alive and has outlived her husband.

By the 1870 Census, all the Dyers and Newtons are gone. They are not in the local cemeteries. There is a possibility that they moved to another area or died and were buried elsewhere.

Clarinda says that she walked 40 rods to the Baptist Meeting House. A rod is five and a half yards. Therefore she walked about 660 feet.

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According to Adams, the First Baptist Church was organized on October 20, 1825 by Eliab Going, its first pastor. Services were held in private homes and schoolhouses until 1832 when a wooden structure was erected. This was the Meeting House attended by Clarinda Newton. It was replaced by another building in 1853. The church burned in 1869 and the following year a new church was built.

Many early records of Franklinville have disappeared. Old letters, diaries and newspapers are valuable for giving us insight into life during the 1820s to 1850s.

Submitted by: Maggie Fredrickson, Village of Franklinville Historian