

I AM JUDSON STONE

By Dayton Levi Birchard

While George Washington was completing the fourth year of his first term as President of the United States; when the greatest single national political issue was states' rights under the leadership of Thomas Jefferson as head of the Democratic party as opposed to the concept of a strong national government as conceived in the mind of Alexander Hamilton as head of the Federalist Party; when the state of Connecticut was still considered by the Yankees to be bounded by the ocean on the east and to be in breadth one hundred miles and to extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific, I was born about four miles from New Preston in Litchfield County, Connecticut on August 27, 1792. Father owned a farm there, and the house in which I was born now belongs to William Hillman.

Garrad was four years old and Mary Ann was almost two when I was born. Canfield the 2nd was four years younger than I, Walker six, Amarillus nine, and Harriet twelve. Mother, Mary Platt, who was born in 1768, was within a month of her twenty-fourth birthday and Father, Canfield, was past his twenty-seventh.

The living of our family was procured by tilling the fields of one of Connecticut's boulder-strewn hillsides. Woodlands had to be held back from encroaching on the newly-cleared fields. Stone walls were piled from rounded stones. Most of our living was taken from the soil and processed by Father and Mother by hard hand labor.

In our home, we were trained in accordance with the more liberal religious views of Connecticut Congregational influence, as compared with the Puritanical and Unitarian controversial (?) tenets of the Massachusetts and Bostonian influences. In later years as I came to more mature years, I was strongly influenced by Quaker teaching and thought. On Sundays we attended the church at New Preston. There we met the Peets, the Turrells, the Daytons, the Kingsleys, and others whose names may now be read from the gravestones erected in the cemetery at Maryall, Connecticut.

At home we were always made aware of heritage, of which we were the heirs. Mother retold the stories of the days of the Indian Wars in New England and along the Connecticut River valleys. Father told us that conditions in England during the reign of Charles II were unbearable for men who would not be serfs and political slaves. The King arbitrarily dismissed his parliaments. Without legal authority, [forced?] loans of money were taken from the people necessitated because the law-making body would not pass tax laws to support the King's extravagances. Rivalry between [competing?] religious groups resulted in Catholic monarch persecuting Protestant Church of England communicants, followed by Church of England Monarch persecuting Catholic constituents. Both groups leveled their intolerant attitudes against the minority non-conformist groups. Puritans, Quakers, and the Pilgrim groups are examples. For these reasons, the New England colonization took place, with fantastic numbers of people migrating from the Mother country between 1630 and 1650.

Father told us that every generation of Stones since 1639 had moved westward. In July of that year, two brothers, William and John Stone, came from England under the leadership of Henry Whitfield and disembarked at New Haven. They had spent six weeks in crossing the Atlantic. The following excerpt from *Milestones of Old Guilford* will best tell the story of their first experiences on America's soil:

We are descended from William Stone.
His son Benejah (1) was born in Guilford.
His grandson Benejah 2nd was born in Guilford.
Benejah 3rd.
Benejah 4th is buried in Maryall.
Canfield.

Father Canfield was, therefore, only six generations from England (counting William as the first and himself, the sixth).

During the years of 1809-10-11-12, there was a great unrest in New England. The years preceding the War of 1812 were filled with controversy regarding ocean traffic. With each [ensuing] year the economic conditions became less favorable. Many of the soldiers of the Revolutionary War had received free land grants to the west. New land seemed to offer by far the best opportunity for ambitious young men to "get ahead." The Connecticut Susquehanna Land Company in 1754 at Albany paid 2,000 pounds [to] the Six Nation Indians including the land lying between the Delaware and Susquehanna rivers. Father was interested in western movement and in support in Connecticut's claim to western lands. He purchased from the Connecticut [claimants?] a piece of land west of the Delaware River. In 1810, when twenty-two years old, brother Garrad went to Pennsylvania to see this land. In 1793 a neighbor, [Leman?] Turrell, had made a trip into the west country. He and his mother had gone to the mouth of Wyalusing Creek to visit his sister, a Mrs. [Whipple?], who lived in the new area. He had walked the entire distance. His mother rode horseback. The following year he returned to the area with his uncle, Job Turrell. Together they surveyed land for the Connecticut Company. In 1810 he brought his family to the headwaters of Wyalusing Creek, where he settled. His wife was his second cousin, Lucy Turrell, and a sister of my future wife Polly.

By 1812 it was definitely settled that Pennsylvania [held?] valid title to the land and that the Connecticut title was void. Prior to October 26, 1812 Father had negotiated with Dr. Robert Rose for the [repurchase?] of the land in Susquehanna County as shown by deeds recorded in Wilkes Barre. On that date, Canfield Stone granted by gift to Garrad the deed to his farm (now known as the Melhuish farm).

When the war broke out with England in 1812, it became apparent that economic conditions in New England would worsen. I decided to go to Pennsylvania. The trip was made by horseback. Some of the [distance?] was made through the settled New York area. By far, the larger share of the trip was through dense woodlands. Wolves, bears, and anthers were still numerous, and deer were plentiful.

After making some inquiries and investigation, I decided to purchase land in Middletown township, next to that of brother Garrad.

Intermixed with experiences of settlement and clearing the land were family matters.

Sister Mary Ann, who married Daniel Dayton, passed away in 1816.

Canfield, who had come from Connecticut and located on a farm just north of mine, passed away in 1826.

Walker, who remained in Connecticut with his family, died in November 1828 following Mother's death in May of the same year. Walker's family came on to Pennsylvania, as they had planned to do, the following spring. Her farm was next to Garrad's on his south boundary.

Father Canfield died in 1836, aged 71.

It was a great blow to me when my older brother Garrad passed away in 1855. He had been a close companion in all the hardships of settlement and a trusted advisor in many enterprises.

Sister Amarillus, the wife of Johnson Watson, passed away in 1866. Only Harvey, my youngest brother, would survive me.

Intertwined with the trials, hardships, and hazards of conquest of a new area, and the sorrows which must come with the passing of my family, were the thrills of successful accomplishment of objectives and the good news of the births of many children. [Then he listed each of his siblings and himself and their children.]

The [perils] and dangers of the [settlers] in Middletown township may be illustrated by the following incident:

One night, a distinct disturbance was heard from a chicken coop near our humble dwelling. Polly and I dressed hurriedly and rushed into the darkness, because we could ill afford to lose any of our few sources of income and food. After arriving at the hen coop and making a hasty survey, I concluded that firearms should be procured to safely [remedy] the situation. I then found a sturdy stick and instructed Polly to stand near the opening of the chicken house. If necessary, she was to deal with the intruder. I went back to the house, loaded my gun, and returned in a matter of some time. Upon return to the area of the hen house, Polly held high a candle-lighted lantern which I had brought with me along with the gun. Soon two bright eyes shown in the darkness. Taking careful aim, I fired in the general direction.

The following morning after daylight, we found upon investigation that we had killed a large bobcat or panther under the chicken roost.

In conclusion, I should like to refer to [Orcott's?] *History of Connecticut*. That volume gives an account of Polly's mother's father, Samuel Peet. He was said to have been a most religious man.

Hours were spent in the woodlands near his home, where he knelt in prayer. The stone where he knelt was hollowed out where his knees made their imprint.

Certainly, if the Biblical statement that the sins of the fathers descend to the third and fourth generation is true, there is illustrated in our family that the intercessory prayers of the fathers for their physical welfare, prosperity, spiritual growth, peaceful existence, and hope of future rewards is illustrated in these our numerous family even to the tenth and twelfth generations. Ours has been a close-knit family, some very interesting marriage combinations having been contracted. [Lists some of the intermarriages.]

This document was typed from hand-written notes by Dayton Levi Birchard. Dayton was a noted local educator and historian. Some of the descriptions are apparently based on writings in Blackman and Stocker as well as family records. The notes seemed to be prepared for a presentation that Dayton gave in 1976 on the occasion of the nation's bicentennial. The transcription was typed by Christine E. Buck in 2019.