

The Story of Albany in the Early Days

Told by Mrs. Maria Pond Warren Tibbitts, 97 Years Old

Janesville Gazette, March 1, 1924

This is a story of the history of Albany written by a resident who saw its very beginning. Few there are yet alive who can remember the inception of any of our villages or cities. Mrs. Tibbitts is fortunate in having lived a long life and a span of years in which she has seen the most marvelous changes ever known in the centuries of the world's existence. A nation has come into existence greater than Egypt in the days of the Pharos. Mrs. Tibbitts has seen her nation through three great wars, witnessed the coming of the sewing machine, the telegraph, the telephone, electrically driven machinery, the discovery of oil and its use in motor vehicles. She tells the story of the settlement of Albany and the epic of that village is the story of a hundred Wisconsin villages.

I will go back in memory to the city of Newark, New York when our Albany was only a thought. Early in the spring of 1845, **Dr. S.F. Nichols and Capt. E.O. Pond** were discussing the reports of lead mines in Exeter, Wisconsin and decided to go and investigate.

Dr. Nichols was a graduate of the Medical College at Bennington, Vermont but was partial to the Thomsonian Theory and practice of medicine. For several days previous to his departure, he prepared medicines in sealed packages, then he placed this medicine in a covered buggy and stored by its side the accustomed pill bag that gave dignity to the old time doctors. Then Dr. Nichols and Capt. Pond started for Wisconsin with a span of horses and met with the usual difficulties of travel in the early days. In due time they arrived at Campbell's Ford on the Sugar River, Wisc. (now Albany) where the bridge now stands. The place was wholly in the state of nature.

The beauty of the countryside decided them to buy land and locate a village. After securing the land, Dr. Nichols went to Janesville, Wisconsin and Capt. E.O. Pond returned to Newark, New York. In the spring of 1846 Dr. Nichols built a log house on this land and on the 14th June the two families were located in their new home and with true patriotism we decided to celebrate Independence Day and this would also give us an opportunity to tell the people our future plans. Word was sent far and near for all to come. My sister, **Miss Chloe Pond (later Mrs. Robert Hewitt)**, remarked "We must have a flag." My parents had brought quite a supply of goods for future use and from this we selected suitable material.

Betsey Ross did not work on the first U.S. flag with greater zeal or interest than we did to have a flag for our first celebration in our new home and proudly watched it floating on the Fourth above the rustic tables that had been prepared on the river bank just south of the present grist mill. No table was ever more loaded than at this picnic dinner for the wild game was plentiful. There were present 75 men, women and children. The only ones now living are **Mrs. Lottie Campbell Clinton** of Chicago, then a baby, and myself,

then 19 years old. Dr. Nichols gave the address of welcome and the group responded by singing patriotic songs.

The numbers of the two families were eleven and five and had been members of the choir in Newark, New York. The late **S.A. Pond** of Janesville, my brother, led the singing by giving the pitch with an old fashioned tuning fork. The tuning fork was as much a curiosity to the children then as the airship is today. As we were eating dinner, **Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Flint**, then newlyweds, came in a lumber wagon, sitting on a blanket covered board on their way to their log home three miles west.

One young man said "I cannot sing but I can dance a break down." We soon learned to give him the right of way as he required a great deal of ground.

Immediately after this picnic, with a team of oxen, S.A. Pond, then 16 years old, hauled the lumber for the second house from Amos Sylvester's mill six miles west, sometimes obliged to first cut the logs and then take them to the mill. Both houses were on the east side of the river a few rods from the present dam. On a few rough shelves in Capt. Ponds home in a corner were kept the dry goods and the boxes and barrels of groceries that constituted the first store.

The daughters, **Mrs. Chloe Nichols, Mrs. Louisa Nichols Warren, Mrs. Chloe Pond Hewitt**, and myself admired the surrounding beauty and thought, as did William Cullen Bryant, "The Groves were God's First Temple". This gave us the idea of a Sunday school to be held under the trees. We had been active in this work in our earlier home and nothing daunted us. With a horse and buggy, we visited the homes of all the settlers within a radius of six miles. On one of the trips, we found a log school house by the road side with a dirt floor, just east of the **Hudson** farm. There was no difficulty in interesting the people and at the first meeting the little building was filled to its capacity. This was very gratifying to the young workers. The meeting was opened with a reading from the testament and the Lord's Prayer. My brother, the late **S.A. Pond** of Janesville, led the singing. While the music was not as operatic as that heard in the churches today, it had an earnestness and volume that filled the air with a melody proclaiming "Peace On Earth Good Will Toward Men". While the modern choir would criticize the rendering, they would at least admire the enthusiasm. As I recall these Union meetings, where no demonstration was strong, all worked together at leaving the impression that "in unity there is strength" and I fully endorse the inter church movement of today.

About 1840 a stone school house was built in Albany and there we held our Sunday school. A passing minister would often preach. Shortly after this, we began to feel the need of a church and as no denomination was strong enough to build one alone, one was built and dedicated the "Union Church" on the grounds of the present Baptist Church. The first pastor who located here was a Rev. Jameson, a Congregationalist. In the old church, our Sunday school enlarged and we had picnics and entertainments to keep up the interest, the latter making us feel the need of a musical instrument, and my melodeon of four octaves was carried back and forth.

The question of fashion in music is an interesting one. The old melodeon of four octaves would be a curiosity to the children of today, for an old music house says that they are nearly extinct and rarely found in any collections of musical instruments.

The old church was cheaply built and lacked comfort and was sold to **E.F. Warren**. The Baptists bought the lot and built their present church and the Methodists erected their church on a separate lot. The Sunday schools of these churches are the children of the school organization of 1846.

The report that Pond and Nichols were building a village attracted others. At that time there were two frame houses and two log houses between Campbell's Ford and Janesville. In 1846, Pond and Nichols, with a surveyor, laid out a village. When it came to naming it, our thoughts went back to our native state. After examining a number of names, we decided on Albany. They also built a saw mill and succeeded in getting a mail route established from Beloit via Janesville, Albany, Exeter, and thence to Mineral Point. Capt. Pond was the first postmaster in Albany.

About two blocks away, we discovered fine material for making bricks. **Mr. Dorr**, who understood how to make them, started a yard. **O. Whitcomb**, a few miles from town, had a lime kiln. Brick layers got 80 cents a day and an attendant 50 cents. There were about a dozen homes built by this time by **Nelson Peckham and Ken Doolittle**.

The houses were in fine condition and an opening had to be chiseled out for a window as if it were granite. The second log house was never built and the one was torn down to make way for a store.

In 1849 **Mr. Zebina Warren** bought the water power and built a grist mill. People began to raise wheat and as this was the only mill for miles around, it ran day and night.

In the fall of 1850 I married **Zebina Warren** my maiden name being **Maria Pond**. Several years after his death I married **Clarence Tibbitts**. Following the English custom, I still live in the home originally built for me.

Our little village was in a thriving, prosperous condition until the outbreak of the Civil War. Many of the businessmen never returned. Through the efforts of **Dr. J.H. Warren** of Janesville and the late **James Campbell**, a branch line of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway was built from Brodhead in 1880.

Today we are a thriving village with our established industries, a latch factory, a large condensory, a grist mill, an electric light plant. We have an accredited school with a new building costing \$50,000 and built with all the requirements of the law including a gymnasium with a seating capacity of 400. The old school house is quite up to date and is used for the grades.