

William Wortman, Pioneer

There was a Wortman family reunion in the 1920s, and the following poem was presented to the family by Miss Stella Crosby, a school teacher. The original printed form was kept by Mrs. Maude Wortman Woodhouse, from Hammondsport, NY. A copy was obtained by Elmer Wright in 1970.

*'You asked me when we met last year
To tell you why we gather here.
I wondered then if I'd find out,
But I've learned how it came about.
I've read that near New Brunswick town,
New Jersey state, a boy was born.
The time when Sullivan had placed
His troops near here and they laid waste
The fields of corn and orchards wide
And burned the red men's homes beside.
In seventeen hundred seventy-nine
The month and day I could not find.
But William Wortman, pioneer,
I am quite sure was born that year.*

*He soon was left with sister small
An orphan with no home at all.
While friends the girl a home did give
And took her farther south to live,
No place was found for our grandsire
Till he was bound to MacIntyre.*

*When freedom came, the valiant band
That had laid waste the Red Man's land
Went home and told their friends they'd found
A garden here, and soon around
Lake Seneca were clearings made
And cabins built in forest shade
And MacIntyre, among the rest
Brought William, too, when he came west.
They reached Peach Orchard at that date
Where William grew to man's estate
And married Anna, good as gold –
Anthony Swarhout's girl, I'm told.*

*When they'd their married life begun
How swiftly Anna wove and spun!
Her little ones made much to do,
So she worked fast, but rested too.
As she herself was not a shirk,
She taught her daughters soon to work,
For Fanny told me that each day
She spun her stint ere she could play.
The oldest Wortman child was she
And busy, too, as she could be.
Both parents felt they needed aid
I wonder how she ever played!
In early spring, I've heard her tell,
She took with her a goose-egg shell
To fill with boiled down syrup sweet,
It surely must have been a treat.
A sugar camp to visit then;
For Fanny went with grandsire when
They sugar made to last a year.
'Twas fun to gather sap so clear
From maple trees, then boil it down,
Did eager children gather round
When Fanny held the egg to view –
Bit brother Amos, Charlotte, too,
With Mary next and Asa small
While father brought a feast for all?*

*As settlers then came on apace
The red men sought another place.
Along Big Stream their wigwams stood
For near there stretched a dense pine wood
With other timber further west,
But savage wolves likes this place best.
Small creatures thrived and droves of deer,
But white men shunned this forest drear,
And so each fall the red men came
And spent the winter hunting game.*

*This dark and dismal forest spread
In eighteen twelve where settlers led
The way to Crystal Springs we call
The valley now. These settlers all
From Putnam County came, and here
Did grandsire come the second year.*

*Why did he come? I think perchance
To give each child a better chance.
There were now six with baby Joel,
With willing hands but no bank-roll
Our grandsire from the wilderness
Must clear a farm to win success.*

*So grandsire came and Fanny, too,
To seek a home where land was new.
How did they cross the pleasant lake?
'Tis thought a ferry they did take.
They landed near a settlement
Called Starkey now. Then westward went
And so they reached while wandering
The tavern kept by Harpending.
No town was there where stands Dundee,
But next the forest they did see
And hemlocks found and lofty pines
With undergrowth and creeping vines
Along the rough trail where they passed,
To Crystal Springs they came at last.*

*Did they go home and then return?
Just what they did I could not learn.
'Tis thought that Fanny came to stay
With grandsire who prepared the way.
And grandsire built in that dense wood
Where wolves did prowl a shelter rude.
'Twas there they camped while grandsire cleared
A little space, a cabin reared.
And when the cabin home was done
He brought the rest to Barrington.*

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*Then two years passed, I understand.
When Elder Simon Sutherland
Who came to Milo, first, you see,
When he moved west in eighteen three,
Who labored with his hands like Paul
And preached the Word with zeal to all.
The pioneers for miles around,
Had formed two churches when he found
The Wortmans and their neighbors then
No gospel service could attend.
He came and preached and churches met
To organize another yet.
We would know how those members planned
Their meeting-house that seemed so grand
And grandsire see among the rest
Who once agreed it would be best
A new framed building soon to raise.
Those Baptists toiled there many days
To finish what they had begun
In eighteen hundred twenty-one –
Their meeting house in Barrington.*

*Secluded from the world without
Those settlers seemed to dwell, no doubt,
No daily mail to bring the news
With cablegrams and statesman's views.
Few letters then from distant folks,
But peddlers' yarns and old-time jokes.
The peddlers went from home to home
And carried news. When he would come
They made him welcome in that day
For he brought news from far away.*

*And startling news a peddler dropped
When at the
Wortman home he stopped
To show his wares and glancing 'round
At childish faces there, he found
They looked like others that he knew
And spoke of it to grandsire, too.
The house was full. Six more did come
To fill the home in Barrington.
Lavine first and Hasley then,
Next black-eyed Sally and again
Another William. Andrew small
And David, youngest one of all.
And so those children stood about
To view the peddler's wares, no doubt.
"Have you a sister?", then he asked,
But then so many years had passed
Since grandsire saw his sister last
That grandsire could not tell for he
Had never heard from her, you see
'Twas strange to hear the peddler say
He knew a woman (far away
She lived) whose children looked the same
As those that bore the Wortman name.*

*Then on his way the peddler went
But grandsire now was not content
To stay at home. He felt he must
Go south to see the woman just
As soon as he the time could spare
And find some one to drive down there
Along with him. The way did seem
So far to go with his ox-team
That young Alonzo Sunderlin
Who married Mary went with him.
And grandsire often must have thought
He might not find the one he sought.
So many miles it seemed he'd gone,
But still the oxen plodded on.
They did not fail him. Day by day
Drove grandsire farther on his way.
So glad at length to reach the place –
His sister's home and see her face.
For forty years I've heard had passed
Since he had seen his sister last.*

*Our grandsire many years did toil
At clearing land and tilling soil.
His children married one by one.
When they had thus new homes begun
A few lived west, the rest lived near
And so the reason's very clear
Why his descendants gather here
As grandsire went so far to see
His sister and liked company.
We well may think as we meet here
Of William Wortman, Pioneer.*

....By Order of the Society