

A TRIP TO **BULL'S** MILLS IN 1827

A story for the children

Submitted by J. L. **Bugbee** Stockton, Feb. 22, 1886

Victor **Hugo**, near the close of his life, was asked by a friend if he believed in immortality. He answered, "Why should I not? I have known Victor **Hugos** since 1802, and I have no reason why this number should not be increased indefinitely."

This answer struck me very forcibly, because I look back to my early childhood, and think of the little boy that bears my name, it almost seems to have been someone else with whom I have an early acquaintance. With me there is a dislike in the use of the pronoun I, and should this occasionally occur in the narrative you will please remember that it means a little boy about nine years of age, known to me a long time ago.

Among the pioneers of Chautauqua nearly all contrived to own a flock of sheep, the wool of which was manufactured into flannel by the family at home. A portion of this cloth would be sent to the fulling mill to be dressed and returned for suits of clothes for the male members of the family. As I write, the sources of fifty years ago rise up before me, in the rural homes of Chautauqua. The hum of the big wheels, the bang of the hand loom, the revolving swifts, and the purr of the quill wheel -- all reproduce themselves with a glance of the mind to all such as partook of this period of unusually activity.

At the time I write, our family were residing on the old Holland Purchase Road, four miles south of Delanti. A piece of flannel has been sent to **Bull's** Mills (Laona) to be manufactured into full-cloth, as it was called. Word had been sent from the mills that the piece was "out" and ready to be delivered. My father was absent from home on business that would detain him three or four weeks. Cold weather was near at hand, and my mother was determined to send me after the cloth, if a boy could be persuaded to accompany me in the enterprise.

Lew **West** was about my age, and resided a mile west of me, was then a favorite friend of mine. We sat together at school and belonged in the same class. Lew was seen and readily agreed to make the trip with me, with the consent of his father on condition that I should work a day for him in the potatoe field. Lew tarried with me over night and at day light in the morning with a pocket full with cakes and cheese, with our nimble bare feet, we took the road leading north, that enters the village of Delanti east of Bear Creek. Passing through the woods for half a mile we passed the log house of **JOSIAH WHITE**, who had located in the wood, the spring before, on the premises now occupied by **WEBSTER COLBY** with two or three acres of clearing, and for more than forty years since owned by **HIRAM LAZELLE**. A half mile farther on we emerged from the woods passing a succession of the houses of **SAMUEL SHEPARD**, esq., **ALFRED TROW**, **HORACE THOMPSON** and soon the hamlet of Bear Creek Corners. Turning east we took the road to Cassadaga, passing in succession the houses of **EATON COOLEY**, **CAPT. JOHN CURTIS**, **JOSEPH SACKETT**, **NATHAN SMITH**, AND A FEW OTHERS WE DID NOT KNOW. About ten we called to rest at the tavern of **ICHABOD FISHER**, who kindly gave us all the apples we could eat.

We had never been beyond this place so at our request Mr. **Fisher** gave us the needed information to take us to **Bull's** Mills. He told us that the first house north was not unoccupied, but was formerly owned by the unfortunate Mr. **CHURCH** who was brutally murdered by **HOWE NEAR** Angelica. When we passed this house, which stood on the east side of the road on a gentle slope, the front door was open, the windows were without glass, and the general appearance was of desolation. Like all unoccupied dwellings, it was a ghost, or a body without a soul. Lew said we better hurry along as he would not like to pass this point after dark. Nearly all the fields contained the stumps from which the forest trees had been taken, indicating that but a few years had passed since the whole was covered with the primeval forest.

In a short time we passed the hamlet of **Shumla** with an unpretentious hotel, and about noon called at **Bull's** Mills for our cloth. **MR. BULL** kindly gave us our dinner, then tying up the roll of eighteen yards, with a loop at each end for our hands, by which to carry our load, we started on our return trip, not however, forgetting to thank the man who treated us so kindly.

I might have mentioned that Lew at this time had ten cents and my pile was one cent less. We had concluded to call at the paper mill at that place and invest the whole amount in paper for a writing book the coming year. One cent a sheet was the usual price for unruled foolscap paper at the store. We called at the mill and were amazed at what seemed to us a world of paper, hanging upon drying racks to dry in the long room. Lew informed the owner that we desired to buy some paper, and on showing his money was told that he could have twelve sheets for ten cents. Lew told the man that it was a trade if he would also give me the same amount for nine cents. The man smiled good naturedly and gave us each twelve sheets. I need not be told that we left highly pleased with our bargain.

Our roll of cloth must have weighed full twenty pounds, making an occasional rest necessary.

When about half way the hill east of Delanti we paused for a rest on a log at the side of the road. The sun was about an hour high: a long black cloud was plainly seen just above the tree tops beyond the western hills, indicating for us the approach of a thunder storm. The smoke from the village chimneys and log cabins up the western slope floated slowly down the valley to the south forming a cloud full a half mile in length and perhaps two hundred feet from the earth. To us the scene was enchanting, and ever since, whenever passing the spot, the picture is reproduced with all its beauty charmingly portrayed. Soon we became philosophers, and turning again to the smoke cloud, that seemed continually increasing in magnitude, we decided that this was the way all clouds were made. While musing in this way, the sun had sank behind the black cloud, before mentioned, leaving a bright fringe on its upper margin and we could faintly hear the rumble of distant thunder.

Although we had spent our last penny for paper, we still had faith in **ALVIN DRAKE**, the landlord of the hotel, and his fascinating wife whom we had known in her early girlhood as **LYDIA DEMING**. We agreed to ask them to keep us for the night, and wait for pay till we could go home and return with the money to pay the bill. Our request was cheerfully granted without fee or reward. For this act of kindness, I fear that Lew and I are still indebted to those kind people, unless our everlasting gratitude will cancel the debt. On arriving at the hotel, we found quite a collection of men, full of life and laughter, over a foot race just completed by our old merchant, **JAMES MARLET**. [To] **MOSES AMIDON**, he had agreed to run up around the black walnut tree, three-fourths of a mile distant in front of the residence of **BENJAMIN MILLER**, starting from the steps of the hotel and returning to the same place inside fourteen minutes. The feat was completed with four minutes to spare. I recollect of hearing someone say that running the last forty rods, his legs flew like drum-sticks. I have before mentioned the black walnut tree, permit me to state, that this one was the only one as far as I know of its kind in the native forest of Stockton. This tree was cut down more than forty years ago. It should have been spared as a thing of beauty, to bless the eyes, cheer the hearts of generations yet born. Speaking of this tree brings to mind also the fine majestic elms, that for many years stood as sentinels and ornaments beside the highway. Many will call to mind the one below the Halfway House, on the Avenue, between Fredonia and Dunkirk. How many think you, have missed this tree, as an old friend that never can return?

Another noble elm stood at the west end of the bridge, that crosses the Cassadaga Creek in the town of Ellery. This tree had been injured by the daily sportsmen in discharging their guns, into the trunk, from the Hotel of **WILLIAM BARROWS**, about 20 rods distant. It became badly decayed upon the west side, and in fear it might fall down on the bridge, it was cut down in 1880. Still another of its family of trees adorned the highway on the north side, near the residence of **JAMES McALISTER**, in the town of Gerry years ago. The next one that occurs to me, was one of the noblest of its kind, standing on the east side of the road, about a mile and a half south west of Delanti. This too was cut down not more than ten years ago, and in passing its prostrate form, who will wonder if somebody felt a little sad? A great many times it had kindly divided the distance, for a little boy, as he went and returned on horseback, to **OBED TAYLOR'S GRIST MILL AT Bear Creek Corners**. The last one which I will now recall, stands on the east side of Cassadaga village, on the premise of **WILLIAM SMITH**. It is believed this tree is still standing, the last of this noble class of highway sentinels, in Stockton. "Long may it wave."

We judged correctly as to the meaning of dark cloud in the west, for during the night we were visited by a fearful thunderstorm. But the next morning the sun shone out as bright as Stockton ever saw. Cheerfully we returned to our homes bearing our burden of cloth, and receiving for this, to us a remarkable expedition, the credit of being two as brave and faithful boys as could be found in the town of Stockton. We did not know but it might be so, and although a little foot-sore we did not complain. My old friend Lew, made his home in the great west full 30 years ago. But during our national Centennial he called on me. His black eyes wore the same pleasant twinkle, but like the writer, his hair was grey, and his face told of the passing years since we stood in class at school, and made our trip to **Bull's Mills**.

The 1854 Wall Map of Chautauqua County helps to re-trace the 1827 route of the children J. L. **Bugbee** and **Lew West** through the towns of Pomfret and Stockton to pick up their parcel and paper.

The children's 24-hour, barefoot, round trip was at least 25 miles.

Map and research submitted by Richard Hunt, Lynne McElhaney, and Wendy Straight, 2010, from map uploaded by Frank Della Posta and Nathan Towne.

The **Sackett** family farms in 1854.

The inns of Delanti (formerly Bear Creek Corners) in 1854.

The Hiram **Lazelle** farm in 1854.

The farms of the **West** family in 1854.

The old Holland Purchase Road.

The fulling mills in 1827.

The paper mill in Laona in 1854.

The **Bailey** Inn in Shumla in 1854.

The Fredonia-Sinclairville Road in 1827.

The later road From Fredonia to Sinclairville.

The Ichabod **Fisher** tavern in 1827.

The Nathan **Smith** farm in 1854.

The **Shepard** family farm in 1854.

The **Bugbee** farm in 1854.

