

IRON CREEK AND NICHOLS SCHOOL

JESSIE M. B. ALLEN

I was first introduced to Iron Creek when I was five years old. My foster mother, Mrs. Theadore Allen, has brought me from her new home in East Saginaw, Michigan, to her old home on the bank of the Creek to show me, her foster child, to her mother and her step-father, Mary and James Nowlen.

When we arrived in Jackson, she left me sitting in the depot with her satchel by my side, and went out on the street to look about. It was her good fortune to encounter John and Charley Loucks, who lived within walking distance of the Nowlen Place. They were in Jackson with their farm team and lumber wagon, and cordially offered her a ride. Gladly accepting, she took me and her satchel to the wagon, and we began the long, lumbering, eighteen mile drive. John did the driving. Charley was a delicate looking boy on crutches. I liked him.

We reached the Loucks farm house some time after dark, and declining further help, started out at once to walk home. It was rather frightening walking through the woods, and the little city girl clung tightly to her mother's hand, We walked in silence. But when we came out into the moonlight, descended a rough hill, and presently stood upon a low wooden bridge over a stream. Mother said, "This is Iron Creek, and we are almost there."

We passed one house, all dark, and there was the Creek again, flowing by the roadside. There were logs sunk crosswise in the cozy road. Mother called it the "Corduroy," and led me cordially across. Then we trudged up a sandy slope and went in at a little gate. The house was dark, but a tall, thin, old gentleman let us in, and called into the bedroom and up stairs.

At once Grandmother appeared, a very straight elderly Irish lady, who welcomed us with kisses. And down the stairs came a tall and willowy young woman, followed by a short blond young man. These were Mother's youngest sister and her husband, Aunt Mary and Uncle Tommy Rushton, recently married.

And now, for some exciting minutes, I was the center of attention. There were exclamations about my light hair and dark eyes, and my dimpled hands; Grandmother said I was like a little leprecaun, and Mother boasted of how brave I had been waiting for her in the depot in Jackson.

The next morning, I stood by Grandfather's chair and watched curiously while he pounded coffee in a mortar with a pestle. These were new words to me. In Saginaw we had a little coffee-mill that hung on the wall a step toward the big red coffee grinder later seen in the coffee stores.

Soon after breakfast, Aunt Ann Sutton came in to see us. She was Mother's older sister, the wife of Elder Richard Sutton who was a licensed Methodist Exhorter. It was their house that we had passed on the way.

When we paid her call, I got acquainted with my new cousins, Mary and George Sutton, and Ben who was about my own age. Iron Creek flowed between their house yard and the barn yard, and standing on the low plank bridge, they showed me a small fish swimming in the stream.

A year to two after this visit (1870 or '71), we moved from Saginaw to Manchester Tounship and settled on land just south of the Nowlen Place. This land had belonged to Mother's brother Uncle George Mathews, a veteran of the Civil War. It was located in the southwest corner of the tounship and of Washtenaw County, where three counties; Washtenaw, Jackson, and Lenawee, join. It was about seven miles from each of the three villages, Manchester, Brooklyn, and Clinton. Now our neighbors of the south were Mr. and Mrs. Wright Mills who lived on the corner where our road formed three corners with that running west to Wamplers Lake and Brooklyn and east of Clinton. The Millses had two sons, Wiley who became a Chicago lawyer, and Edgar somewhat younger.

Life on the farm was still rather primitive in Michigan in 1870. Elder Sutton still did his teaming with a yoke of oxen and wore a yoke himself for carrying heavy pails of swill to his pigs. Aunt Ann baked in a Dutch oven on the fireplace, and cooked food in an iron kettle hung from a crane

Grandmother made tallon candles in a mold and spun woll on a big wheel. When candles gave out, we used a "slut-light," a bit of rag laid in an old saucer and covered with tallow or lard.

Harvesting and haying was done with cradle or seythe, and threshing by fail or horse power. Wheat and corn were taken to the flour mill in Manchester or Sharon to be set emptyings to raise salt-rising bread. Later we bought yeast at the Manchester Brewery to make yeast bread.

We slept on corded bedsteads on straw or corn husk ticks in summer, with a feather tick added in winter. As for house cleaning, Mrs. Sutton said all she required was 10¢ worth of lime for whitewashing.

Cigarettes were not yet the fashion, but two of our freinds, highly respected elderly woman, smbked clay pipes, drawing much comfort therefrom.

One of the first accupations I learned about on the farm was bark-peeling. Trees were cut down, and Father with Mother to help him stripped the bark from the logs, piled it on a sled, and took it away to a tannery.

There were paring-bees, where with little paring-machines, we pared bushels of apples, and quarted and cored them to dry on lath racks around and above the kitchen stove. These dried apples sold for 3¢ a pound. We kept a few to use when the apples in welcomed the old Jew-pack-peddler who came trudging up from Detroit with a mountain of limen on his back. And there was the time-peddler Sloan, with a wagon full of water-pails, dippers, milk pails, strainers and pans, and best of all, shiney dinner pails.

A spring of cold water answered for our refrigerator. We hung our cream there before churning and hardened the butter there before taking it to town.

Agne afflicted us children and the better bonest-tea that supposed to cure it afflicted us still more. We did not know that mosquitoes were to blame. We raised swarms of them in our rain barrels. Our only screens were cotton mosquito-bar.

When I had a sore throat, a big slice of salt pork was bound about my neck, fore runner of Vicks Vapo-rub. Bread and Milk poultices reduced white swellings and boils. Mustard plasters sometimes cured inflation of the lungs. (If they blister so much the better.) Stewed cranberries took the fire out of erysipelas and lame backs were cupped for bleeding.

Agents drove through the country with patent medicines, pain-killers chologogues and sarsaparilla. But when there were serious illnesses someone was sent to Clinton for Dr. Tuttle or to Manchester for Dr. Lynch.

The great event of the year, was our visit to the State Fair in Jackson. With a pan of fried chicken and another of rice pudding under the buggy seat we started early and drove into Jackson arriving soon after sun-up.

Ostensibly we went to see the livestock, and we did see them, great Perchon stallions, bulls with rings in their noses, Poland China and Chaster White pigs. But I think our real reason for going was to see the races. When we had seen them, we started for home well satisfied.

There were several log houses still occupied in our neighborhood. A short distance east of the corner, on the Clinton road, was a loghouse where lived Justice Oliver Nichols who had been elected Justice of the Peace in 1846, and Mrs. Nichols the most famous housekeeper in the community.

In 1852 Oliver Nichols and Robert English had applies to the Board of School Inspectors for the formation of the District No.3, and now a short distance west from the corner in the north side of the Brooklyn road, stood the Nichols School. Here I first went to school, along with Mary, George, and Ben Sutton. My first teacher was the lovely Miss Ella Mansfield at whose knee I learned the alphabet.

The first man teacher I remember was Mr. Dwight Marion, a marvelous scholar Spencerian penman. Then ther was Rezin Maynard, the handsome son of the beloved preacher Elder Maynard, and Mr. F. Bilmayer who made a specialty of spelling. I still treasure a gift edition of Tennyson's poems that he gave me as a prize for spelling the school down. It is dated 1878.

Nichols School House was in those early days a true Community Center. Spelling-bees, School Exhibitions, Singing School, Preaching services, Sundry School, and Temperance meetings were held there, and each year during the summer vacation the women and girls of the district came with pails, mops, scrubbing-brushes, and polishing-rags to clean the school-room and put it in order for the winter term.

Mr. Tallcott, Addis Berger, and Frank Throne were some of our winter teachers, and Effie Stevens, Leonora Sheffield, Mary Mattison, Laura Lee Gray and Minnie Hunt taught the summer terms about 1872 to 1881.

Mr. Tallcott's specialty was Mental Arithmetic. I recall the problem that he gave to take home: A boy has some apples in a basket, he gives one of his friends half of his apples and half an apple over, and another half of the remainder and half an apple over. He then has one apple left. How many had he at first? One or two got the answer by experimenting, but when Mr. Tallcott showed us that it could be done easily by algebra, we all wanted to study algebra and some did study it.

Mrs. Laura Lee had a fine sense of humor. When she first taught the Nichols school in 1876, Clara Reynolds and I were great friends about 12 years of age, but we had quarreled. One morning Mrs. Lee read to us a story that suggested that if your friend was cross it was a good idea to tell her pleasing stories. I had one to tell. I raised two fingers and was given permission to "speak."

I went to Clara's seat and whispered that my Mother tied two setting hens together and put them in the stubbles on the hill back of the house to fatten and forget to set. And that morning our old cow had come tearing sown the hill bellowing and tossing the squalling hens in her horns.

When I reached that point in the story Clara and I both laughed out loud and Mrs. Lee sent me to my seat. But when recess came and we told her the story she laughed with us. And when a few years later she came to teach our school again, as Mrs. Laura Lee Gray, she wrote in my little blue and silver Autograph Album. "Remember the pleasing story of '76?"

In the Catholic Church in Manchester which is built of field stone, some of which came from our neighborhood, a stained glass window commemorate the name of Laura Lee Gray.

In preparation for the School Exhibition which capped the climax of school entertainments Friday afternoons were devoted to "speaking pieces" and practicing dialogs, The smallest children were invited in the summer.

I remember Ben Sutton who afterward graduated from Adrain College and became a preacher and teacher, standing up front with his vest on wrong side out and rattling off:

"I don't know how it came about  
I put my vest on wrong side out,  
I would not turn it back all day  
For fear twould turn my luck away."

And a tiny little Braman girl recited:

"Hang up the baby's stocking  
Be sure you don't forget,  
The dearest little darling  
Never saw Christmas yet,"

That very year this sweet child died from scarlet fever, a sad experience for our school.

We older children learned, "The New Chruch Organ," and "Over The Hill to the Poorhouse," by Will Carlton and after the Chicago fire, "Men said at Vespers," "All Is Well!" "In one Night the City Fell," "The One Hoss Shay," "Marco Bossarus," and "Daruis Green and His Flying Machine." These were favorits for the boys, and Mary Sutton recited "Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight." We all gasped when she cried dramatically:

"Out she swung, far out!  
The city seemed a tiny speck below!"

Adults as well as school children took part in the Exhibition. A stage was built across the front of the room, and there were tableaux that set us all coughing as well as cheering.

The "Goddness of Liberty," copped, and draped in bunting a big bright United States Flag held proudly erect by her side. This was the first and the favorite.

Then came dialogs. I will remember the thrill of the moment when Wright Mills, as small man playing Fritz James and backed by a big canval covered box, faced the husky Roderick Dhn. He drew from its scabbard the sword he had borrowed from Albert Van de Walker and cried,

"Come one Come all!  
This rock shall fly,  
From its firm base  
As soon as I."

Albert Van de Walker, the owner of the sword had been a Gouave in the Civil War much admired for his picturesque costume and his soldierly bearing. His sword was in great gleam for Exhitation. If two were needed Uncle George loaned his.

One young women appeared in bloomers to give a "lecture" on "Women's Rights," so absurd that it brought down the house.

The singing was taught by Mr. Wright Mills. We carried lanterns and candles which were made to stand on the much carved desks in a bit of there oun melted tallow.

Mr. Mills used a turning-fork to give the key. He sang a fine tenor. Mr. Allen carried the bass, Mrs. Frank English was the leading soprano, and sometimes Mrs. Mills played the little melodian that the men carried from her house to the school.

We youngsters loved to shout the round:

"Scotland's burning,  
Scotland's burning,  
Pour on water,  
Pour on water."

We listened in a hush awe when Marion English sang, The Cottage By The Sea.

Politics claimed attention too. When the Republican raised a spliced tamarack pole at the corners, floating a pennant with their candidates names, the Democrats immediately raised a tall Hickory pole as near to it as might be with the names of their candidates.

That evening Mr. Mills came driving by our house, and yelled, "Hurrah for Tilden and Hendricks!" Father sprang to the door and shouted back, "Hurrah for Hays and Wheller," "Hurrah for a rope to hang them," was the hurried response, as Mr. Mills gave his horse the reign.

The first minutes I remember was Elden Maynard. I know he was a kind man, for when he visited us, he asked me what my china dolls name was, and when I confessed that she had no name, he said "let, us call her Maud," and Maud she was ever after.

I think it was for Elder Maynard that a Donation was given at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert English. Hams, apples, flouer, potatoes, and canned fruit were donated, and the hat passed for cash.

A long table was set for the supper. Mr. English served hat riz biscuits. She said she didn't know good they were and famous everbody laughed, for she was famous for her fine baking.

The Elder and Mrs. Maynard and their family were great favorites. There were Kate and Mary full of life and fun, and Regin, who taught the Nichols School one winter, and afterwards, I am told, taught Public Speaking in Los Angeles and had Lawrence Tibbet as a pupil.

Uncle Richard Sutton also preached at the schoolhouse. I recall being roundly scolded for laughing one solemn night when, preaching on kingdoms of the earth, he scornfully commented, "and the poor, miserable Devil didn't have a foot of land to his name!"

In those days, our school was visited by the Tounship Superintendent of schools, G.P. McMahon. He took the names of pupils who stood 95% in the monthly examinations, and gave the list to Mr. Mat Bolsser, he published it in the Manchester Enterprise. Here is a copy of one such report: District No.3 Miss Minnie Hunt, Teacher.

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|----------------|-----------------|
| Jesse Allen    | Cora Reynolds   |
| Addie Beech    | Clara Reynolds  |
| Irene Bramam   | Arther Reynolds |
| Dell Campbell  | Grant Sutton    |
| Kittie English | Orion Stitt     |
| Edgar Mills    | Ella Wellwood   |
| Wiley Mills    |                 |

Miss Hunt soon after married Professor Robinson, Principal of Manchester High School and taught the Grammar grades under him. Later they taught together in the East where she was still living in 1940. I think Laura Lee Gray followed her at Nichols School.

District No. 4 Miss Ella Scully, Teacher

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|---------------|----------------|
| Ella Brown    | Ellen Rushton  |
| Albert Dorr   | Norace Rushton |
| Vincent Green | Willie Rushton |
| Lela Herman   |                |

District No. 5 Miss Alta Tuthill, Teacher

Zell Baldwin	Fannie Mattison
Cren Baldwin	Annie Poucher
Maude Baldwin	

District No. 6 Miss Lydia Paidly, Teacher

Ida Cushamm	Frank Logan
Ella Chadwick	Rosa Miller
Charley Chadwick	
Delmar Walworth	

District No. 7 Miss Flora Deane, Teacher

Maggie Clark	Thomas Noone
Ambrose Kirk	George Stautz
Fernie Kirk	Ida Taylor
Lizzie Mbehn	

District No. 8 Miss Dora Reed, Teacher

Bertie Allen	Myrtia Holmes
Archie Allen	Rosa Scully
Chris Bowers	Kate Scully
Lena Gall	Agnes Scully
Gussie Gall	

In connection with District No. 8 here is a copy of an old contract:

Between Ebenzer Davision, Director, and Elizabeth agrees to teach a primary school in District No. 8 Township of Manchester for the term of 3 months from the 7th day of May, and for such service faithfully reformed the sd. Board of sd. District agrees to pay the sd. Elizabeth the sum of \$1.50 per week. Dated, Manchester, May 7, 1860.

Signed (Ebenzer Davision ,Ditector  
 (John Raby, Assesor  
 (Elizabeth Mathews, Teacher

Ella Wellwood brought a new wholesome influence to our school life. Mrs. Margret Wellwood with her three sons and daughters, William, Robert, and Tom, Sarah, Anna and Ella had cone to live on the old Nichols farm, bought form Albert Vandé Walker, Ella later married Charles McMahn and their daughter Eleanor is now living in Clinton, the last of the Wellwood family. 1974.

Wiley Mills became an attorney in Chicago. His son Clinton is a physican in Ann Arbor having served in the U.S. Army in World War II.

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There was no lack of sport at school. In doors we played tin-tin, button-button, and twirl the platter, and hide and seek. The boys played cross-pins which was called gambling if they kept the pins they won.

In entries the small ones played pussy-wants-a-corner and the older ones danced to singing of "Charley."

"Oh Charley, he's a nice young man,  
Oh Charley, he's a dandy,  
Oh Charley, likes to kiss the girls  
Whenever it is handy."

And again to "Jersey Boys" a relic of the Civil War.

"The way is broad and the road is clear;  
Jersey Boys, come volunteer."

On the stoop we played "Kings Land."

"I'm on the Kings land, the King aint to home,  
He has a sore toe and can't run."

If the King succeeded in touching the trespasser, he shouted "Poison," and joined the others to torment the new "King."

That old stoop was the scene of some marvelous stories. One Eddie Hoxie and I got to school before the teacher arrived to unlock the door. We sat on the edge of the stoop to wait. Said six year old Eddie tossing his head, "I took my seyth this morning and went out and cut three acres of grass."

I read a very recently that on December 30, 1946, Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Hoxie celebrated their 64th wedding anniversary. Evidently Ed's early exercise agreed with him.

On the ground we played "London Bridge" which I like. Kings Land was know doubt brought from England by the English settlers. The Bramans, the Rushtons, The Wm. Johnsons and the Robert and Richard Green were English.

Another left over from the Civil War was-

Wash the lady's dishes,  
Hang them on the busches  
When the busches began to crack  
Hand them on a nigger's back.

In line of baseball we played "Three old cats" and "Anti I over."

In winter there was coasting down Bramans hill across the road from the school and skating and sliding on Braman's lake. Bramans lake is fed by springs, and the perch, blue gills and the sunfish from its cold waters were firm and sweet.

