

The Old House Speaks

By MARY HELEN SCRIBNER

Madam Regent and Members of the Piankeshaw Chapter,
Daughters of the American Revolution:

I have been asked by some of your members to tell my story.

I have never kept a diary but I will try to recall as much of my life as I can.

I first came to consciousness of the fact that I was to be in the Spring of 1814. My Master, Joel Scribner and Mary Bull, his wife, had come to New Albany on the second day of May, 1813, and with the William Waring family had been living in a double log cabin near Sixth and High Street.

Neither family being small, the cabin was crowded, and there was much talk about a new home being needed. Then when trees were cut to make room for me, I knew that I would soon make my start in life.

Sugar maples, poplars, and beautiful shiny birch trees, all had to come down, and a thick undergrowth of green brier, spicewood, and pawpaw had to be cleared away. It would hurt me now to hear the ring of the ax in those grand old trees, but then, like all youngsters, I was only impatient to get started and was filled with excitement when I knew that my cellar was being dug and my basement and three stories were going up.

At first I was too young to realize that I was any different from the other houses that were scattered down High Street, but as I grew I began to notice a certain distinction in my make up. They were using bricks in my wall instead of logs, and covering them with sawed boards. I heard little William say that I was to be the first frame house in town, and at that I began to hold my head a wee bit higher.

Well, the family moved in. There were my master, Joel Scribner, my mistress Mary Bull Scribner and their children, Harvey, William Augustus, Lucy Maria, Mary Lucinda, Eliphalet, Julia Ann, and Phebe. I thought that quite enough of a family for me to shelter, but in a little over a year, I saw some very fine sewing being done, by hand in those days, embroidery, wee tucks, puffs, cording and all. Then one night I was awakened by a tiny wail, and I knew that I had another to care for. Little Harriet Naomi had arrived.

Yes, I know that they all thought they owned me, and cared for me. I've heard them do a lot of talking about keeping house, but it has always been the other way around – I've kept them, every one and cared for them, from my first master to my last mistress. I've held their babies, helped them fight the croup, watched over them as they grew up, listened in on their love affairs, planned their weddings, and taken the whole responsibility of the family on my shoulders.

I even started them to school and to church. If it had not been for me Miss Lucy could not have taught school in my front room down stairs where little girls looked out of the window at the wood choppers instead of doing their sums.

And when for some reason the Presbyterian Church could not hold its meeting as was its custom in the High Street House, I offered them my best room and the family just couldn't get out of going to meeting when it was held in the very house in which they lived.

But to go back to the school, there was a little girl named Harriet who came to Miss Lucy. She was a good little girl, too, but one day she went through my dining room just at noon. There were some hot boiled potatoes on the sideboard. I saw her take one and eat it. I knew that her mother would be grieved, for in those days children were taught that to take the smallest thing without asking was stealing. And sure enough her mother sent her back the next day to tell aunt Polly, that's what they called my mistress, all about it, and to say that she was sorry, and I heard my mistress say: "Why child, whenever you are hungry just tell aunt Polly and you shall have something to eat."

Then it was just tell Aunt Polly, later it was just tell Adaline, for we always loved children and from the time the cooking was done by the great open fire place in my basement dining room down to the days of the wood stove in the outside kitchen there must always be something for them to eat.

When the children of the fourth generation visited me on the Sabbath Day between Sunday School and Church there would always be a plate of something for them on the stand in the front room upstairs. Sometimes it was good home made bread, butter and sugar cut in thin strips and piled log cabin fashion. Sometimes it was crisp sugary cookies, and sometimes the most delicate angel food layer cake with quince jelly filling. That last was Adaline's make and the most delicious I ever tasted.

Oh I can brag, for after Ad came I never did the cooking myself, but just kept an eye on her to see if I could discover any of her secrets.

And secrets she must have had for there were never fried potatoes like hers.

Fried potatoes in the blue dish, light rolls, light biscuits she called them, pickled pears, Spanish cream and coffee - that was a supper fit for a king, and anyone who ate of that supper once ever after talked of Ad's fried potatoes in the blue dish.

And cookies, the best that anyone ever ate. I nearly burst with indignation to this day when I think of how she used to bake cookies over in the summer kitchen and how almost before she got the pan out of the oven there would be two or three of the youngsters waiting to eat one of those precious cookies. Once, it seems to me, they took two or three apiece out of each pan. How she ever had enough left out of a batch to fill a cookie jar, I don't see.

But as usual I am getting ahead of my story. Long before this a number of my masters' family had followed him West. His brothers, Abner and Nathaniel, had come while he was in Cincinnati, before my day, but I was old enough to remember quite plainly how glad we all were to see his mother, Phebe, his brother, James, and his sister Elizabeth. I felt relieved of a great responsibility when his mother came, for I knew, mother-like, she would help

more than any one else with the morals of the family and especially with the bringing up of the grandchildren. I was glad that she was there when young William decided to go to Cincinnati with his uncle.

Nathaniel was going to New York on business, and as there were no steamboats running on the river here, and no public conveyances of any sort, the trip as far as Cincinnati had to be made on horseback.

When William took it into his head to go that far with his uncle to bring back the horses, it seemed to me too long and lonely a trip for a lad of fifteen but his grandmother seemed to think him quite a man and quite responsible enough to travel alone.

She was right for he made the trip, three days there and three days back, in safety.

And I always was glad that Mr. Nathaniel made that trip to New York for when he returned in the fall he brought his sister Esther with him and Miss Elizabeth Edmonds. It did not take me long to decide that that business trip had been a successful one. He and Miss Elizabeth were married very soon. In 1818 Mr. Nathaniel went to Corydon with Mr. John Graham, the surveyor, to see what could be done about a new county, for at that time we were still in Clark County.

The petition for the county was granted but Mr. Nathaniel was taken desperately ill and when the family reached him he was beyond all hope of recovery.

In 1822 young William left us again, this time to practice medicine in Paoli. Having studied with Dr. Asahel Clapp and been examined by the medical board at Charlestown, he started off with all the assurance of a young M.D.

Though I must confess that when he wrote to us of visiting one patient with intermittent fever, one with remittent and one sick child, three patients in town and one in the country I felt almost as uneasy about him as I did when he started for Cincinnati, but I need not have given myself so much concern. He proved fully able to care for himself and others.

At Paoli he made friends with a certain Thomas Chapman who, half in fun and half in earnest, promised him his youngest sister for a wife.

Thomas died while taking a boatload of produce from Leavenworth to New Orleans but his two sisters, receiving the melancholy intelligence of his death, deemed it their duty to him to visit his family. That was the winter of 1826, so bitter cold that it chills me now to think of it.

The young ladies traveled as far as Cincinnati quite comfortably. But by that time the cold was so intense that the Ohio River was frozen over and as a public conveyance coming this way was a rarity they had to remain there for several weeks.

One day a spring wagon drawn by four horses stopped at a public house across from the Chapman home. It was to carry congressmen as far as Cincinnati and return empty unless passengers for the return trip were found. The driver being very much of a gentleman, Mrs. Chapman felt that the problem of her would-be guests was solved and sent a letter written

by Dr. William, requesting the sisters to return with him. This they did and I judge that Caroline Matilda must have approved her brother's promise, as did the doctor, for it was only the next October that I saw Ned and Trim, the doctor's horses come dashing in State Street, turn the corner and stop at my front gate.

It was just at sunset. The sky was still blue, blue with red and gold clouds banked over the knobs in the west. It was one of those brilliant pictures October always brings me but I remember that as the doctor helped Miss Matilda from the buggy I thought that no sky could rival the brightness of their faces.

I suspected that we would have a wedding and I was not mistaken.

You can see it on the records, William Augustus Scribner and Caroline Matilda Chapman were married at New Albany, Indiana, October 25, A.D. 1827.

Oh there were plenty of weddings in the family. It was hard to escape them with so many good looking young folks about.

Of course Miss Lucy never married for she kept school, but Mary Lucinda married Dr. Asahel Clapp, the Botanist. Julia Ann married Rev. Leander Cobb and in due season became the Grandmother of Anne Cobb, the dialect poet of the Kentucky mountains. Phebe married James Cooper Davis. She was the mother of your own Chapter member, Mrs. Mary Scribner Collins.

I felt just like the mother about all those weddings. I could hardly wait to see the children happily married, but when they left me I was too lonely for words. I was glad therefore, when after five years more of practice in Paoli the young doctor went into partnership with Dr. Clapp, and with his wife came back to me. They brought little Harvey with them from Paoli, but before long he grew too big to be the baby, so we had to get another, Caroline Sophia, and when she had outgrown the baby clothes they were handed down to Harriet Rowland.

When dear little Anna Maria came, she and my mistress both left us and we were very lonely for awhile, but before very long Harriet Partridge Hale consented to come and be a second mother as the children called her. They never allowed any one to call her a stepmother for she always said that she was a real mother to them, and as far as I could see she was.

Her own Charles Edward was a big boy before he knew that Harvey, Caroline and Harriet were not his own brother and sisters.

Eddie always was a lively chap and from the time he could talk, liked to make folks laugh. He was quite a musician.

Mr. Nutting, whose silver band had taken prizes at both New Orleans and Boston, taught him to play the snare drum and he in turn taught nearly every snare drummer in town.

He was a great mimic too and if a comic stunt was wanted at an entertainment, I knew before hand that he would do it, or part of it with Mr. Haskins to help.

Many is the concert we've gotten ready for at our house. Miss Hattie used to have a singing school of her own. All the children in town belonged, it seemed to me, at least all I ever heard of.

Then she played for the choral society when Mr. Siegfried was leader. I can just see her yet the way she looked when she went to a concert.

She had the prettiest dresses. The one I liked best was white silk pineapple tissue with crossbars of pink. It was made a full skirt with three wide flounces, a gathered waist with round low neck and short puffed sleeves. There was narrow pink silk fringe on the flounces and at the edge of the neck and sleeves. Miss Hattie had a pretty plump neck and with her beautiful chestnut brown hair brushed smooth, braided and done in a coil, fastened with two gold hair balls, she looked to me like one of the pinks out of our own garden.

Talking of how Miss Hattie looked reminds me that I thought I was rather fine looking myself in those days. I was always painted white and my shutters were of a dark shady green. We used to close the shutters on hot days and turn the slats to let the breeze from the river blow through. To step into the hall from the street on a summer day was like stepping into a cool shady glen.

My front windows were short like my back ones. I rather liked them short myself. I thought they were more in keeping with my style of beauty.

I've heard folks say that my floors are hard wood. I'm not sure about that but if they are, would they not refinish beautifully?

At first my third story was not finished, and when Harvey used to sleep there he would wake up on winter mornings to find snow on his coverlid.

Did you ever notice the window on the east side of that room? It looks like a dormer window but it is really built through the big chimney.

That chimney is really a curiosity for it takes care of all the flues from the basement to the attic. It begins as though it were going to be two chimneys on the east side of the cellar and basement dining room. Each is built up through the first and second stories and attic and then they unite in an arch over the attic window into the one big chimney you see on my roof.

That attic window was the favorite play house for all the children of the later generations.

Phebe's granddaughter and Harvey's daughter used to play there by the hour with a big box full of little china dolls, doll dishes and sewing materials. They were the greatest girls to want to stay all night. It never rained too hard for them to come to me but if one drop fell at going home time, it was excuse enough for them to stay and they would sleep with Miss Esther in the big cherry bed.

My back porch upstairs was the next favorite spot. There were awnings to keep the sun off and that made it the finest place to play and read. When the awnings were down there was the river to watch with its ferry boats going over to Portland and the big packets coming up

from Evansville. From there we used to watch the fireworks from the Louisville Exposition on Fourth Street. Oh things were never dull on my back porch.

The one down stairs was for company. That's where folks came to see the night blooming cereus and where they gathered after missionary meetings and Busy Bee annual meetings.

My parlor was pretty too. I can think of nothing more cheerful than my parlor in winter with the bright fire and the bracket lamps on each side of the chimney. The rosy carpet and my lovely old mahogany furniture. The paper in the parlor used to be just the right background for mahogany furniture too. It was blue-gray with stripes about three inches wide made up of little gold lines and between the stripes were white medallion-like figures edged with gold.

At the windows there were white embroidered muslin curtains looped back over round silver curtain holders and in summer it was just as cool and delightful with the breeze from the river as any spot could be.

My front yard was a pretty place too. The brick walls on either side never spoiled it for they were always covered with vines and close to them were annual roses and a big pink moss rose bush.

In early days there was an arbor over the front walk where the old fashioned honeysuckle grew and bloomed in delicate creamy fragrant clusters. There was a border bed on either side of the walk from this arbor to the front door. Next to the arbor were tall white lilies and at the end of the bed by the house were two large red peonies.

The back yard was a delight to me for it was so beautiful and at the same time so full of places for my children to play.

The rockery with its ferns, the pond with its gold fish, pond lilies and large umbrella plant in the center. The grape arbor with its close clusters of sweetest Delawares, and underneath it the bed of lilies of the valley.

In the center of the yard was a round bed of tuberoses and rose geraniums, and at each end of that, the tight little red and gold dahlias. But best of all was the border bed beside the board walk. There is a sense of something so lovely that I just want to shut my eyes and breathe when I think of the crepe myrtle that grew there, and the memory of the tea rose too, makes me catch my breath. But the other flowers, the purple columbine, the bleeding heart, the sweet William, touch-me-nots, rose moss, and Johnny-jumpups make me think of children skipping happily and calling to one another. How they loved the bunch of everlasting plant. They would take a leaf and press it together until they separated the two sides and then blow it up like a glove finger.

But there, I am quite out of breath, and out of order too, I am afraid, talking so much about myself. But I am so excited and so happy that I could sing for joy. A few years ago I thought I was never to be anything but a shabby old building. But now I just wish I had a great big looking glass so I could turn and turn and look at my new coat of paint, green shutters and all, and my beautiful porches. I want to look again and again at my fireplaces and the dear little table that came across the mountains with my family. Many is the time

I've been afraid some one would chop it up for kindling wood. But it is safe with all the other lovely things you have given back to me and all I can do to thank you is to say that I will try to take as good care of the D.A.R. as I did of my own family.

A SKETCH OF PIANKESHAW CHAPTER DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

One beautiful October day almost thirty-five years ago two score of enthusiastic, patriotic women took a joy ride, in a moving van, to the home of one of their associates four miles in the country to assist at the birth of an organization for which they had been hoping and working and planning for months previous.

Miss Mary E. Cardwill had been appointed by Mrs. C. C. Foster, the State Regent of the Daughters of the American Revolution, to organize a Chapter in New Albany.

The names recorded on our chapter charter are Miss Mary E. Cardwill, Mrs. Frances Rice Maginnis, Mrs. Helen Marr Fawcett, Miss Anna E. Cardwill, Miss Fannie H. Hedden, Mrs. Martha T. Gwin, Mrs. Anne E. Evans, Miss Estelle Kinder Sowle, Miss Emma Dewhurst, Miss Mary Annabelle Smith, Miss Susan Eleanor Hooper, Miss Theodosia E. Hedden, Mrs. Anna Hedden Greene, Mrs. Margaret Mitchell Johnson, Miss Carrie B. Webster, Miss Alice L. Greene, Miss Anna Fitch Bragdon and Miss Clara Kimball Bragdon.

We rejoice that we still have five of the Charter members with us. We have lost eight by death, three by withdrawal and two by transfer. One other, Miss Clara Funk, was at the meeting when we organized and came into the Chapter five days later. We now have eighty-four members and one hundred and fifty-six members have been on the roll.

We have two Life Members, Miss Clara Funk and Mrs. Anne Rogers Thorn.

Our name, Piankeshaw Chapter, was selected by a committee of three, Miss Clara Funk, Miss Fannie H. Hedden and Mrs. Margaret Mitchell Johnson (Sieboldt) as the most appropriate a Chapter in Clark's Grant could have and one to which a beautiful and romantic sentiment would ever cling. Clark's Grant was the hunting ground of the Piankeshaw Indians. These in their intercourse with George Rogers Clark became his devoted friends, calling him the Great White Father. In token of that friendship they transferred the land to him (except a path to his door which should be theirs forever) in a most eloquent deed signed by their Chief Francis, Son of Tobacco, before an ungrateful American Commonwealth had reluctantly ceded the Grant to Clark and his soldiers as payment for services that virtually ended the Revolutionary War.

Some of our members had ancestors who were with Clark in taking Vincennes.

The Chapter was instrumental in locating thirty Revolutionary soldiers' graves - four of these are in Fairview Cemetery.

During the World War we did a great deal of patriotic work including the care of a French orphan.

In 1917 we bought Scribner House, the oldest house in New Albany, from Miss Hattie Scribner, who was the granddaughter of Joel Scribner. The house was built in 1814 and restored to its original condition by the Chapter in 1932, under the efficient committee headed by Mrs. Elizabeth Cannon, Mrs. Mary E. Clark and Mrs. Fannie Wright Huff. All these years it has been used as a Chapter House by the D.A.R. Much of the original Scribner furniture has been replaced in the house.

The following are the Regents, each of whom served faithfully for a period of two years except the organizing Regent, Miss Mary E. Cardwill, who served twice, a period of two years each, and the present Regent, who has recently taken office:

Miss Mary E. Cardwill

Miss Theodosia E. Hedden

Miss Mary E. Cardwill

Miss Adelia Woodruff

Miss Clara Funk

Mrs. Bella Buckley Smith

Mrs. Abigail Smead Loughmiller

Mrs. Mary Annabelle Hartley

Mrs. Margaret M. Seiboldt

Mrs. Elizabeth H. Cannon

Mrs. Mary S. Collins

Mrs. Aurelia Hickey

Mrs. Caroline McQuiddy

Mrs. Anna H. Greene

Miss Edna L. Sagabiel

Mrs. Pauline H. Strack

Miss Lillian Emery

Mrs. Jessie Schechter