

(April 24)

SOME GREENFIELD AUTHORS.

Written by Lucia Russell for the Greenfield Historical Society, 1949.

(Condensed)

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The Greenfield Historical Society has a list of Greenfield Authors. This list, though not complete, has over one hundred names of persons, belonging to Greenfield either by birth or residence, whose writings have been printed.

Ministers were Greenfield's first authors.

The Rev. Edward Billings was installed minister of the Congregational Church in 1753, the year of the town's incorporation. A pamphlet of his is probably our earliest publication. Immediate successors to Mr. Billings, the Revs. Newton and Olds published sermons which, while bearing marks of diligent reading in their early days, are now of interest to us chiefly as Greenfield Imprints. The Rev. Mr. Newton's sermons were said by Willard to have been distinguished for "their sound sense and their particular brevity in cold weather."

The "Beekeepers of America" in June, 1948, met in Greenfield to honor the Rev. Lorenzo L. Langstroth, sixth, sixth pastor of the Congregational Church on the hundredth anniversary of his death. This because of his invention of a beehive which revolutionized the business of beekeeping, became standard equipment for beekeepers all over the world and has never been improved upon, in principle. A stone marker was put between the church buildings and the Coleman-Hollister house, where he was the principal of "The High School for Young Ladies" from 1839 to 1848. Mr. Langstroth published a book, "Langstroth on the Honey-bee" which was a classic and went through several editions. His biography was published by Cornell University, where there is a collection of Langstrothiana of which the University Entomology Department is very proud. Langstroth is said to have been "a gentleman of fine abilities and cultivated mind." Major Alvord "recollects" (in Thompson's History) that he preached with great regularity except late in the spring, when he took a vacation,

because it was the swarming season and A Swam of bees in May is worth a load of hay."

A minister, but by avocation an agriculturist, the Rev. Henry Colman came to Greenfield from Salem, bought in 1831 a 200 acre Cheapside farm and worked it successfully for several years. Oliver Wendell Holmes in "The Professor at the Breakfast Table" described a great elm, one of the finest trees in symmetry and beauty I have ever seen," says he saw it on "what used to be the Colman farm, in Greenfield." Mr. Colman sold the farm in 1836 and became Massachusetts Commissioner of Agriculture. His report on "Silk Worm Culture in Massachusetts" has an added local value from the great interest Greenfield people took in silk worm culture at that time. There is still at Stone farm one of the 1200 mulberry trees that Dr. Stone planted for feeding silk worms. Colman wrote also a two volume work on "European Agriculture." He travelled extensively in Europe and died in England, Lady Byron gave his grave in Highgate Cemetery.

The Rev. George Ripley was, to quote Thompson's History, "perhaps the most learned and accomplished scholar who ever originated in Greenfield." He was born in 1802. He graduated at Harvard College, first in his class, was a minister in Boaton for fourteen years and wrote during that period articles for various journals. He left the ministry in 1840 and founded "brook Farm," an "Association for Education and Agriculture", and perhaps the most famous of the social experiments by intellectuals. It is in this connection that he is most widely known. After five years a fire put an end to the venture, already a financial failure. Mr. Ripley went to New York where he was Literary Editor of the New York Tribune for thirty-one years. He was one of the founders of Harpers Magazine.

His crowning work was editing, with George William Curtis, the American Encyclopedia. A recently published book, "The Transcendentalists" includes more of his work.

Greenfield's first history was written by David Willard in 1837. It is now a collectors item. While Willard is not to be relied on implicitly he is still an authority to be consulted, especially for his sketches of early citizens, and he is a joy to read, with his pungent comments and pithy anecdotes. There are in his little book, pages of moralizing and enough poetry quotations to make a good-sized anthology.

Our scientists have given Greenfield her widest spread fame. There is one Greenfield Author whose chief work, it is safe to say, will not be read by many of his townsmen; yet he was probably through it Greenfield's most widely known citizen; for he gathered his material by private correspondence with government officials of Siberia, The Geographical society of Irkutsk, Officers of the British Hudson Bay Company, and the Royal Observatory of Holland, while missionaries at several places in Siam, Persia, Syria, Palestine and Constantinople made daily records for over two years, which they forwarded to him in manuscript. "Winds of the World" by James H. Coffin was published by the Smithsonian Institute and considered by them "as perhaps the most important contribution to knowledge which the institute has ever given to the world, combining material of abstract scientific interest with knowledge immediately applicable to the practical affairs of life." James Coffin was in Greenfield from 1828 to 1836 as principal of the Fellenburg Academy, which he founded. Though his researches in meteorology were not started until after he left Greenfield and his Monumental work was not published until after his death, he published while here two small octavo volumes on "Book-keeping by Single and Double Entry," which gained a large circulation, being used by seventy schools in Massachusetts and by a large number in New York. While a tutor at Williams College he had, on Mt. Greylock, what is thought to have been the first meteorological observatory in America. For this he invented an ingenious mechanism for recording Atmospheric movements

by clockwork.

Dr. James Deane, born on a Colrain farm, practiced medicine here. Interested in all aspects of science he published many articles in medical and scientific journals. During the Silk worm culture activity he invented a machine for winding the silk from the cocoon, which with his descriptive notes is pictured in the Colman report mentioned above. His great achievements were bringing to the attention of the scientific world the dinosaur tracts found at Riverside by Dexter Marsh, and his book "Ithnographs from the Sandstone of the Connecticut River." On this book he worked the last twenty-four years of his busy professional life, making the most exquisite plates to illustrate it. He died leaving it unfinished and the Smithsonian Institute finished and published it.

Greenfield's best known poet was Frederick G. Tuckerman. Many Greenfield people pay unconscious tribute to him when they speak or think of "Poet's Seat" which came by its name from having been a favorite haunt of his. Indeed he may have named it, for we find in one of his poems a reference to "the Poet's Rock," while lines in another confirm his familiarity with the place. "I once again- one still fair day and in the sunshine of the afternoon, climbed upward to the over-looking ledge--there glimpsed the village, sunk in foliage at my feet." Mr. Tuckerman was a lawyer, a member of the Boston bar, but abandoned his profession for study and travel. A lover of nature he was an acknowledged authority on the flora of Franklin County. He was a contributor to various magazines.

A volume of his poems was first printed in 1860 and three editions were published, one in London. There are delightful bits of nature description in his verses, which have a local-color appeal to us. In his book is the hymn written for the dedication of the Green River Cemetery. He wrote also an ode for the dedication of the

soldier's monument on the common. On a trip to England he visited Tennyson, who gave him the original manuscript of "Lockesley Hall."

Judge Charles Allen began his distinguished law career here during the 1850's, and was most active in Greenfield life and affairs. He organized the course of lectures which brought Thackery and Emerson here, was a founder of Greenfield's first Library and helped establish the Green River Cemetary. Though he moved to Boston in 1861, becoming later a Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, he never lost interest in his birthplace and contributed most generously to it's welfare. He published in 1900 a book, "Notes on the Bacon-Shakespeare Question." Two of his arguments are based on Shakespeare's bad law and Bacon's bad poetry.

I have left till the last one who probably comes first to the mind's of this audience, - Mrs. Mary P. Wells Smith.

Mrs. Smith was a most prolific writer. She published, in the forty-four years between 1874 and 1918, twenty books for children and one for adults, besides many papers for her church, historical societies and memorials. Her books for children were in four series; Jolly Good Times, 8 volumes; The Young Puritan, the Old Deerfield and the Summer Vacation with 4 each. We who were privileged to read as children the Jolly Good Times books can never forget the charm they had for us. In her Historical Series she shows what seems to me her outstanding talent, that marvellous ability to so vividly describe the children of the olden time that the colonial history of this Connecticut Valley is made alive to her young readers as many of them find in their long ago ancestors children just like themselves. "Miss Ellis' Mission." her one book other than those for children, was written to further the work of the Post Office Mission of the Unitarian Women's Alliance, which she helped organize.

A letter of hers written in 1925, giving her own account of her

writings, follows in part; -And this is now Mary P. Wells Smith speaking-----.

"I began writing fifty years ago. I had always had a great taste for composition writing and my father would often say to me, 'Mel, I believe when you grow up you could write a book if you would try.' I owe a great deal to his influence. He was a great story teller, and fond of telling stories about the old times when he was a boy. I read an untold number of books to get my historical facts. Before I wrote the Puritan series I passed a part of a summer in Plymouth, where I looked up many details about the Puritans and read Gov. Bradford's Journal and other books giving details of their life. I was anxious to secure accurate knowledge of their language and habits.--I went to Hadley, saw the first town records, made many notes and visited the old grave yard where the first settlers are buried. I think that I can say that the historical parts of my stories are entirely true. I wrote the first part of "The Boy Captive of Old Deerfield" in Washington, I found valuable help in the museums and in the Congressional Library, getting many facts of interest,--- I enjoyed writing my books greatly, and I still enjoy the pleasant words of appreciation I get from people who read them as a child and whose children are reading them now."

Miss Ashley has given us the following from her publishers; "In July, 1927, Mrs. Mary P. Wells Smith, of Greenfield, celebrated her 87th birthday. In that same month also Mrs. Smith's publishers reissued in a complete new edition her story for boys and girls called "Jolly Good Times." This book was first published in 1875 and has continued in demand for 52 years. Hence its new dress. Such a compliment as this paid to a book for boys and girls would be a feather in the cap of any branch of letters. Which of our present "best Sellers" may anticipate so long a life and a rebirth a half a century hence."

Miss Ashley adds "In the Public Library there is a steady demand for all titles; the Historical Series Leading in Interest."

John Haigis, Jr. adds that the "Boy Captive of Old Deerfield" will be re-issued next week and will be available May 1 at Barrett & Baker's. There is a new 4-color jacket for it from a painting by Stephen G. Maniatty of Deerfield. This will be a limited edition so it is suggested that those interested sign up at Barrett & Baker's to make sure of your copy.