

Early Days Along the Passaic | Nutley Yesterday · Today - 1961

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FROM MRS. HENRY W. GOODRICH

THE late Mrs. Henry Wicks Goodrich exhibited a picture of the Passaic River painted by Jacob Ward. One of the authors of the history of Nutley which was published in 1907, Mrs. Goodrich lived with her daughter, Miss Constance Goodrich, and her son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. William W. Goodrich. Another daughter, Frances, who lives in Hollywood, is well known as a member of the play and screen writing team of Frances and Albert Hackett. She and her husband are authors of the play "Up Pops the Devil" and numerous moving pictures, including "The Thin Man" series and "Easter Parade." Another son, Lloyd Goodrich, a resident of New York City, is director of the Whitney Museum of Art.

"This oil painting is called in the list of my grandfather's furniture 'A View of Belleville.' It was painted, according to a rough guess, no later than 1850, probably earlier. It shows a stretch of the Passaic River from the present Greenwood Lake railroad bridge spanning the river from North Arlington to North Newark, up to the Belleville bridge at the foot of Rutgers Street. (By the way, my son says that the little sailboat is all wrong, that it couldn't have sailed.) In spite of this criticism, the painting has been pronounced on good authority as an excellent one for that period. As to the artist, my recollection is that he was a Jacob Ward of Bloomfield, a close friend of my grandfather, and it seems that he was by no means without considerable reputation. Records in the New Jersey Historical Society give a full account of him and his work, and the Society owns one of his landscapes which has been engraved.

"When, as a child, I came out from New York to Belleville to visit my grandfather, one of my earliest impressions was of this picture which hung over the mahogany card table in the hallway of his house on Main Street. A vivid memory, too, is of the shining river, gleaming at the foot of his green lawns; the swish of the branches of the great weeping willows as they trailed and dipped into the stream; the 'plomp,' as old Morris Shelley threw a long rope into the water bringing up the pail dripping and sparkling, for the Passaic served every purpose except for drinking water. There are also memories of savage attacks of New Jersey mosquitoes on my fat New York legs. Toward evening as twilight settled down, I loved to hear the sturgeon leaping in the river, and the clip-clopping of horses' hooves on the bridge nearby. These are the things that a child remembers. "Well, just as you see in this picture of 1850, Belleville was a town when I came for visits; a border of houses along the river banks, a few residences in a couple of streets behind Main. In the picture you see the Mansion House, considered to be a desirable hotel for New Yorkers to summer in, a glimpse of Christ Episcopal Church, and of the larger

Dutch Reformed Church near the bridge.

“Stranger yet, when my father brought his family to live in Belleville in 1876, had another artist painted a second picture, ‘A View of Belleville,’ it would have differed very little from the ‘view’ of 1850. Not as yet a single building on Washington Avenue which was supposed to be only for stately homes; green fields; toward the north, Joralemon’s Farm and dense woods running up to what is now Centre Street.

“By 1876 as a great concession to transportation - for as a child I had to reach my grandfather’s on foot from Second River Bridge - we now had a horse-car running up Main Street from Second River for a few blocks ending at Holmes Street. It was a one-track tiny car which tinkled its slow way occasionally through the middle of the street, drawn by one aged horse. This Toonerville Trolley continued its ministrations well into the 80’s.

“In the meantime the Erie had been built, running from Jersey City to Paterson, the stock so well watered by Jim Fiske and Jay Gould that even with the best intentions in the world, which we hesitate to ascribe to the Erie, it could never be any good.

“I must say a word about our river. In my grandfather’s time and long before, the Passaic was considered second only to the Hudson, as desirable for gentlemen’s country seats. Its banks were lined with the homes of the old Dutch aristocracy. There were the mansions of the Schuylers, the Van Rensselaers, the Cortlandts, the Stuyvesants, the Morrisses, and these houses were still there when I was a young girl, but their owners were gone.

But that was all the better for us young people. We were free to wander under the great trees at Fairlawn - the development Fairlawn keeps the old name - ; we enjoyed the old gardens, their box bordered paths and faded rose arbors, the nymphs, Venuses and Apollos fallen prostrate in the grass. The old glory was gone but what was left had its loveliness.

“When in 1892 the Henry Goodriches moved from Belleville to Nutley, there was still one of these beautiful homes but lived in by its family - ‘Nutley,’ the home of Thomas W. Satterthwaite was charmingly placed where a bend in the river afforded a view up and down its course. The family, Mrs. Condit, Mrs. Nairn, still kept open its hospitable doors. I remember costume parties when old uniforms and dainty muslin dresses were dug out of its trunks in the attic. The chief event for our children in the Christmas holidays was the great tree at the James Satterthwaite house where the granddaughter, Mrs. Larkin, and her husband delighted the neighboring children with gifts, games and a magician.

“As I was much occupied at home, adding for one thing to the population of Nutley, my activities were naturally restricted in most cases to my immediate neighborhood and I did not see as much of the older part of our town as I would have liked. There were then around us green fields where now are houses. On Nutley Avenue from The Enclosure to the river there were possibly

six houses; Highfield Lane one, Grant Avenue six, with the tiny Grace Church building on the corner of Whitford Avenue, Walnut Street with the Coe house, the Stockton house (now the home of Mr. and Mrs. David L. Miller), and two others.

“The Enclosure was the most thickly populated; as now, one looked down a tree-lined roadway to the lovely old house at the western end, now the home of Faris Feland, and just beyond the Stone house, now the home of the Walter Schaefer. There was no West Nutley. Other homes were being built in small numbers, but no developments as yet for years to come.

“Our neighborhood had as a social center, the Field Club, where we had amateur theatricals, readings, teas, dances and children’s parties. This club has now reverted to its early state as I first saw it - a vacant field, although there was even then a small building where the Archery Club, as it was then, could keep some equipment and cups for the out-of-doors teas.

“I am not one of those who think the old times were the only good times but naturally there was in Nutley, because of its small numbers, a more intimate feeling. Nutley is now a town very much alive and I am glad it is alive to the importance of reviving and preserving our past, linking it to our present and future-which is the aim of our Historical Society.”

Tags

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