

Excerpts From ...

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF CHARLES B. SLYFIELD

Once upon a time in the long, long ago, in the midst of a terrible northeast storm at the old stone dwelling at the South Manitou Lighthouse of which my father was at the time keeper, a baby boy was born and that small bunch of humanity was me. They named me Charles, I suppose because they could not think of anything better to call me. This memorable day was June 8th, 1854. I have always been told that on that day the snow fell to the depth of six inches which went off again very soon with a rain.

The brig rigged vessel, "J.Y. Scammon", owned by Hannah & Lay Company of Traverse City, came ashore that day in the Manitou Bay right where the U.S. Life Saving Station now stands. I have always supposed that the storm that day was a terrific one for that season of the year.

Well, I managed to live through my infancy and grew for about four years. From 1858 I can remember the building of the keepers dwelling at South Manitou from the men boarding with us in the summer of 1859; also a schooner coming ashore the same fall. Its name was "Mina Kinny" and came ashore a little west of the Lighthouse. I remember that two tugs worked on her getting her off the beach and the sailors stayed at the Lighthouse. The lantern where the light was kept was constructed like a cupola on the end of the dwelling, but in after years it was changed and the 100 foot tower that is used now was built.

In March 1859 my brother, Edwin, was born. I now remember that day well as though it was but yesterday. In the summer of 1859 my father resigned as keeper of the Lighthouse and I, with the rest of our family boarded for about three weeks with a man by the name of Putnam Burdick, who lived about two miles west of the Lighthouse on the shore of the island, father being at that time over on the main shore, about two and one half miles north of where Empire now is, building a house or shanty on a farm of 160 acres of land that he had previously purchased.

The Manitou Island at that time, and for some years before, was used as a wooding place for steamboats, as most of the boats burned wood in those days. They would come and lay at the dock and take on wood for several hours at a time, enough to run them to Chicago and return to the island, and it was easy for one to get away from there then, as a number of boats wooded there each day, going either to Chicago or Buffalo.

To return to my story, when father had got the house nearly done, Mr. Burdick took me with the rest of our family, consisting of Mother, sisters Ella and Mary and baby brother Edwin, and loaded us into his mackinaw boat with a few of our earthly belongings, setting her sails and started to cross over to our new home.

It was a lovely day about the middle of July. The lake was calm except for the small ripples caused by the light southeast wind that was blowing, just enough to

fill the sails of our boat. The sky was clear and sunshiny, an ideal summers day. The wind was so close that he could not steer for our landing, but came in about three miles north of our shanty. He tied his boat behind the wreck of the schooner "Gold Hunter" that had been wrecked some years before. Then we all started and walked to our new home. Mother carried the baby and Mr. Burdick carried little sister Mary, only three years old who was sick coming over from the island. When we arrived we found father hard at work trying to complete the house. (Of course, if we had sent him a wireless, he could have been expecting us). Then he and Mr. Burdick went down and brought the boat up with our goods.

There was a small patch cleared, perhaps an acre, besides a lot of timber that was blown up by the roots as though a cyclone had gone through there. Another shanty stood about twenty rods south of ours where two families of fishermen were living and fishing off the beach that season. The men married two sisters, and they all lived in one shanty. They had three children between them. They only stayed a few weeks after we came there and I never knew where they went.

It was a pretty lonesome place to stop at, no neighbors very near. Mr. John LaRue lived where Empire now is. He moved there the same season that we came. He had a wife and six children. They lived in a small shanty right on the beach of Lake Michigan. A man by the name of Thomas Wickham lived at Glen Lake, about three miles east, and Glen Arbor was about nine miles north. There was a dock for wooding steamboats and a small store there. Also a few families scattered around.

The greater part of our household goods were taken from the Island to Glen Arbor by a small schooner that Father chartered for the purpose to carry his live stock which consisted of three milch cows, then young cattle, and a flock each of chickens and turkeys. From Glen Arbor the cattle were driven to our new home, and the other things were transported in a small boat along the shore.

My little sister, Mary, was taken sick coming from the Island, and I was also taken sick a few days after. We were both down at once, and were sick for about three weeks when sister died on the 15th of August, and I had begun to improve. I was troubled with a tapeworm which passed away, but they never did just know what her sickness was. On the morning of the 15th she appeared very much better and brighter in every way.

Father had business at St. Clair and as she appeared to be getting better he went to Glen Arbor and took a boat for Port Huron and St. Clair, and at sunset that night she died. Mr. Burdick had come back from the Island and was clearing land for us. He brought his daughter June along to help Mother and keep her company. She was about 17 so it wasn't quite so bad as being alone, but it was a hard blow to Mother as the child was her favorite and pet, and the rest of us children were so young that we hardly realized what was going on.

I remember Mr. Burdick made a little pine box or coffin and painted it black, and they laid her in it to sleep her last long sleep. There is little eminence overlooking a beautiful little lake about one half mile south of our old house on

the shore of Lake Michigan where they laid her to rest. Mr. LaRue and some of his family, Mr. Burdick, his daughter, Mother and us children followed to her last resting place. It was a small funeral procession without a minister to say a word of comfort. But I suppose it was just as well as she had gone to a better world from which no traveler returns. As Jesus has said in his word: "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not for such is the Kingdom of Heaven", and I have faith to believe she is there.

When Father came home he made a little picket fence around the grave and also put up head and foot boards, and painted the whole white with black lettering on the headboard, telling her name and age. It has now stood 52 years and the little fence and head and foot boards still stand, and the lettering is still quite plain.

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C. B. Slyfield
Frankfort, Michigan