

Milford Times: Jan. 30, 1897

### Fifty Years Ago

It is my purpose in this sketch to relate what I remember about the first big show in Milford and of the epidemic immediately following. The show was "Herr Dreisbach's Great Menagerie," brought at enormous expense to instruct and entertain the inhabitants of Milford and the surrounding country, as was duly set forth by a few large, and a great many small posters.

It may be that the menagerie and the almost universal sickness that followed had no connection, being merely, as an old-time resident, Jonas G. Potter, would have said, "a casual juxtaposition of events." However, in a recent conversation had with Henry B. Mowry, he said that his father held the opinion that the menagerie was the exciting cause of the epidemic. Dr. Mowry patronized both the show and the fever coming soon after. But about the great show.

On the appointed day the inhabitants were on hand. They came from far and near; from Fenton, from Hartland, from Howell, from Brighton, from Kensington, from Hickville, from Commerce, from all the country roundabout, and some from Byron thirty miles away. The day was exceedingly sultry and warm, or rather hot, and the tent was packed with perspiring humanity in their Sunday best; beside a great many other animals clothed upon with a very loud odor. With some friends I attended, or attempted to do so, but the heat was so great and the effluvia so overpowering that we remained but a short time.

It is safe to state that during one or two weeks in the month of August, 1846, more people in the village of Milford and vicinity were confined to their beds than were able to attend to their usual avocations. It was very difficult and in some cases impossible to find help to properly care for the sick. The attack of sickness was sudden and violent, the fever high, accompanied by great depression; yielding readily however to medicinal treatment, and followed by a quick recovery.

The Pettibone mill was at that time being built, and my cousin, Chester Thomson, and myself were working on the mill as millwrights. Immediately we were called upon to nurse as well as we were able during nights. At least we could give patients needed medicine and a drink of water. I had been up two nights in succession, working through the day, and had consented to sit up half the following night at Mrs. Vroom's, when toward evening I received a message from A.C. Baldwin urging me to call at his house for a short time that evening. On reaching Baldwin's residence on the South Side, I found himself and wife and Miss Weller down with the epidemic. Miss Weller was from Pontiac, was teaching school on the South Side, had discontinued school and volunteered to nurse Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin, but was at once taken down herself. Mr. Baldwin said to me that he had sent a messenger for Mrs. Churchill (his wife's mother) that she might arrive at any time and certainly before ten o'clock that evening, and would I stay until she came? Of course I would and did-all the night long and until about sunrise when Mrs. Churchill came. Late in the evening Dr. Foote called, leaving medicines and directions for the care of the trio of patients. I took the best care that I could of the three, but medicine and water seemed to be about all that was needed. It was a weary night and once I fell asleep in my chair to be awakened by a noise at the front door. Of course I thought Mrs. Churchill had arrived, but it was Mrs. Baldwin trying to unlock the door. She said she was going home to mother, but soon consented to go back to bed. Otherwise the night was uneventful but very, very long.

The sickness of Dr. Mowry gave Dr. Foote more than it was possible for one man to do, and I saw him fall asleep while feeling a patient's pulse. The incident at the Baldwin residence is related to show the exigencies of the time and the difficulty in finding well persons to care for the sick. Looking back through a vista of fifty years makes the things herein related appear tame and commonplace, but I do know that it was an anxious time in Milford.

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