

Recollections of the home of
ALEXANDER AND MATILDA FARNUM SLOAT
in Scotchtown, N.Y.

by their daughter, MARY JANE SLOAT (1863 - 1946)

(This recollection was written April 18, 1937 at the request of Dorothy Shinn Sloat for their son, Francis Wilbert Sloat. Mary Jane would have been about age 74 at this time.)

My Father and Mother and family worshipped every morning immediately after breakfast. One of the children would pass the hymn books and give the Bible or New Testament to Father. He would select a hymn, my Mother would start the tune and the family sang it. We had two, sometimes three hymn books without notes. If Mother, who, I think knew the words of many hymns, did not have a book, she often said "what meter is it?" One of us answered "long meter", "common meter", "short meter", according to the letters above the hymn: L.M., C.M., S.M. She had a tune for each meter. "Rockingham" was one of her favorite tunes. (In The Psalter 1912 this was used for Psalms 9, and 142. In the Trinity Hymnal 1961 it is Number 43, 359, 509.) After we sang the hymn, Father read a chapter from the Bible. I think he read the Bible through chapter after chapter. After the Bible reading we rose and then knelt at our chairs while Father prayed. How often I have heard him give thanks for our being able to worship God without being afraid. After the prayer, we rose from our knees and went about our several duties.

One evening when I was quite a small girl I was surprised to find my parents having evening worship too, but without singing. I suppose I had always been in bed and asleep that late in the evening until that night.

Our home was in Scotchtown, New York. The lot contained one half acre. On this lot were an apple orchard, having in it beside apple trees, one or two cherry trees, a vegetable garden, the barn, the shop and the house surrounded on three sides by our front and back dooryards, separated by a white picket fence. The front yard had a white picket fence. A gateway connected the two. On the fourth side of the house was a lane leading from the road to the barn. I understood my Father bought this home almost as soon as he was married, and paid cash for it. (Knowing my Father as I did I believe he had saved little by little each year from his wages as an apprentice and thus had a sufficient amount to buy a modest home.) Here all of his children were born. Here the oldest two died, a girl, Frances Almeda, one and a half years old, and George Harvey, six months old. Here my Father and Mother lived over fifty years until the death of my Father, August 11, 1900. Soon after that Mother went to my sister's home near Scotchtown, where she died the following April 15, 1901.

Our house was a long one-and-a-half story house painted white with green shutters. In time the green board shutters were replaced by green blinds. A "stoop" painted yellow having four or five steps led to the front door. This was later torn away and a covered porch was built. For many years the end of this porch was covered by woodbine. The door had a brass knob, which Mother often directed us to polish. Whether we grew tired of polishing it, or whether we "children" thought it old-fashioned, it was taken off and a brown porcelain knob was put on and a door bell was added. On each side of the door was a high narrow hall window, one pane 7x9 inches wide. The door also opened into a narrow hall running through the house from the front to the back door, which also opened on a "stoop" having seven or eight steps. In the middle of the hall was a jog in the side wall. In this jog was a stand having two drawers - one was Anna's and one was mine. In these drawers we kept our precious school papers, essays, maps, and I suppose, examination papers.

Opposite this jog was a door opening on the stairs leading to our basement. The stairway was enclosed, consequently, rather dark. When I came up the stairs alone in the evening I imagined loins and tigers following to catch my heels. Over the kitchen stairway was another enclosed one leading to our garret. In our childhood it was the "garret", later it became the "attic". At the right of the hall was the door leading into the parlor. I always liked our parlor. Even in my childhood I felt the influence of the simple beauty of this room. It had three windows, two opening toward the south and one toward the east. The woodwork, except the mantel piece, was painted white or cream. There were three paneled doors, each panel surrounded by moulding. In the two upper corners of the frame work of two of the doors, perhaps all of them, were carved concentric circles. The mantle piece was black. On this mantel stood two Britannia candle sticks. In front of the chimney piece was a fancy little cast iron wood stove.

Beside the door leading into the hall, there was one opening into the "parlor bedroom" and one into a closet. In this closet my mother kept her best china tea set. In the closet, also, were glasses of currant jelly and one bottle of wine. This same bottle of wine stood on the shelf when I was a tiny girl and still stood there when I was grown up. What became of it I do not know. Our sitting room was a large room opposite the parlor. It had a recess on the north side, in which, during my childhood days, was a maple bedstead with a straw tick filled with straw, and on this a feather bed covered with a bed quilt. On this bed my Mother and Father slept when I was a child. The bed had a valence. On the opposite side of the room were two windows opening to the south, with 7x9 panes of glass. There were green board shutters. Later green blinds were put in the windows of the house. I remember we had fancy green window papers to the sitting room windows that were rolled up to whatever height was wished and held up by a tape or cord of some kind. When we changed all of our window papers for window shades that could be rolled up and down on a roller at the top fitted with springs and catches so they could be stopped anywhere, we felt proud of our modern window shades.

On the west side of our sitting room was the chimney with a high long mantel. On it I remember stood a black iron ornament something like a small clock with a round opening and a place in the back to hold my Father's watch. I remember also two framed prints of trees - one a tree of good fruits, the other a tree of bad fruits, as I vaguely recall. The trees were loaded with fruit in the shape of circles with words printed on the circles, such as industry, wealth, health, and their opposites on the other tree. I am inclined to think they were the trees of temperance and intemperance. In the recess at the end of the chimney stood my Father's homemade desk which we children looked upon as something sacred. We were not to touch anything in it. On the desk stood a homemade bookcase having three shelves and solid doors. I loved to open these doors and look at the books, reading their titles when I was old enough to do so. A world history - Peter Parley's - consisting of three volumes was interesting to me. I loved to read about England, especially Queen Elizabeth and her 3,000 dresses. Of course, I had dreams of being a queen, but when my Mother, led by some of my questions about a queen, asked me if I should like to be a queen, I was too embarrassed to admit it. Some other books I remember were, D'Aubigne's History of the Reformation, Doddridge's Rise and Progress of the Soul, three volumes of the Bible in leather bindings. These books had voluminous notes by Scott, I believe. It was a familiar sight to see my Father on a Sabbath afternoon with one of these volumes in his lap or hands diligently reading Scott's explanations of the text. Another volume was an old leather-bound Bible in which the *s*'s were made like *f*'s. Two small books, both given Anna and me, I think, by Grandma Farnam. One was the life of "Duchess de Broghie". That is almost all I remember of that book. The other was about the life of a lady belonging to the Astor family, I think. The frontispiece was a picture of the lady wearing a dress of sheer white material with a low round shirred neck and short puffed sleeves, gathered full at the waist line. The lady wore short hair curled all over her head. How I loved to look at the "beautiful lady".

On the parlor table lay the family Bible. Sometimes on Sabbath afternoons, one of us would bring it to the sitting room, place it on the table, and we children would have a good time looking at the pictures of Adam and Eve being driven from the Garden of Eden, the Deluge, David slaying Goliath, etc. (I am not at all sure that I have the titles of the pictures correct.) How interested we were in the family record:

Alex Slott born Oct. 13, 1822
Matilda Farnam born Oct. 20, 1822
 married Feb 7, 1850
Frances Almeda born ? died ?
George Harvey born ? died ?
Stephen Farnam born Mar. 13, 1857
Mary Jane born Apr. 2, 1863
Emmet born Oct. 30, 1865

Although these dates are correct, I do not think the arrangement is correct. The Bible was burned in the Monticello fire many years ago. (1909) ((Charles A. Comfort's remark: Notice the name "Slott"))

Another book that lay on the parlor table and which I enjoyed reading stealthily was a little red bound book with gilt edges which was called "Friendship's Parting gift". On the flyleaf was printed, "A Parting Gift" and in my Father's handwriting:

Alex Slott to
Mrs. M Slott
Feb. 7, 1850

One poem I liked began:

"Little Ellie sits alone
Mid the beeches of a meadow."
"Romance of the Swan's Nest" by E. B. Barrett

Another was entitled "Farewell to a friend going abroad" - Carpenter

This book is still in my possession (1937 - later it went to Minnie Sloat Chapin). Other poems were:

The Parted Lover	Sir John Suckling
Farewell	James Perring
To the Queen of my heart	
Come, let us rove	
Remember Me	
Lady Clare	
Meet me at sunset	
An Arabian Song	
A lament for the Wissahiccon	

Our garret was an interesting place. In the center stood a large cot. On it Mother kept her extra feather pillows, always carefully covered with old bed quilts. Against the side of the garret was the old trundle bed. I can just remember it in use. On the opposite side stood a red painted wooden cradle with a wooden hood, also, a black spindled cradle, almost a crib. In one corner stood a big spinning wheel at one time used for spinning wool. I remember this wheel in use just once. It stood in the middle of our kitchen, my Mother sitting not far from it. I was to take the wool off the wheel when Mother had finished her spinning. I must have run out of doors to play, for when I came into the kitchen, the wool had been taken off by my older brother, Stevie. I was broken hearted. But to go back to the garret. Near the big wheel stood a little wheel for spinning flax. In the upright central post was a toothed little wheel that would click every so often. It was probably for measuring the amount of flax spun. This wheel I never saw in use, but I liked to make the little wheel click. Near by was a reel for winding the wool or flax. I do not know which, into skeins.

Hanging on pegs or nails were fine straw - Milan straw, I think - poke bonnets, and hoop skirts. On one side of the garret stood a good sized chest painted gray. In it were kept home woven checked brown and white woolen blankets, bed quilts. There was one piece of patchwork ready to be made into a quilt, that my Mother mentioned one day as being made of the "children's dresses". The children she referred to, I found were Frances Almeda, my parent's first child who died at the age of 1-1/2 years, and George Harvey, the second child, who died at the age of 6 mo. Their little tomb stones mark their graves in the old Scotchtown graveyard. One end of the garret was finished off as a bedroom. Between the ceiling of the room and the peak of the roof were kept the quilting frames.

Another interesting thing was the bed wrench. This was made of a post of very hard wood about 18 in. long and two or three in. in diameter that had been planed, sandpapered or made smooth in some way. At one end it had been gouged out to the depth of 1-1/2 or 2 in. making two short legs. About 3 in. from the other end a hole had been bored through the post and another round stick an inch in diameter had been hammered through this hole until it extended out like arms perhaps four or five inches. It was absolutely tight. To me it suggested a doll. This device was brought from the garret once a year or so at the time of the spring house cleaning.

All of our bedsteads except the hospital bed on which my Grandmother lay during her last illness were cord bedsteads. The two that I remember best were of beautiful wood - maple, I think. Each bedstead had four beams, two long ones fit into the head posts and the foot posts and one fit into the two footposts. Through the longer beams had been bored six or eight holes, and through the shorter ones, four or five holes. A strong bed cord like a clothes line was pulled through the first hole of one long beam, then put through the opposite hole of the other longer beam, then back through the second hole to the opposite hole in the first beam and so on back and forth until it reached the hold in the foot beam, then put through the second hole and back over and under until every hole was used. Then the "wooden doll" was used to draw the rope absolutely taut.

On the cord spring was placed a straw bed, and on the straw bed a feather bed. Then between homemade sheets, with our heads on "live goose feather" pillows under home woven woolen blankets and homemade comfortables, we slept warm and cozy. For sleeping in a cold room with the thermometer down to zero, give me the old fashioned feather bed. In the room at one end of the garret was a "high chest" brought from my Grandmother Farnam's. (Milton Comfort may still have this chest?) It was the size of a large bureau. There were in the lower half two full sized drawers, the upper half was a chest, the top being the lid of the chest.

(1940 addendum) Back of our basement kitchen was a "sink room", in which was a sink and pump over the cistern. In this room was a wood box, a churn sweep, wash tub and other things. The rough foundation stones of the house formed part of the sides of this room. These rough stones formed ideal places for spiders to spin webs. I would brush them down, then find spider webs the next day. One morning I said something to this effect to my Mother - "I brush the webs down every day and they are here again." My Mother replied that I should have to brush them down every day unless I killed the spiders.

Hymns my Father loved to sing;

All hail the power of Jesus' name
My days are swiftly gliding by (sung at Alex's funeral)
O, happy day that fixed my choice
Sweet hour of prayer
A charge to keep I have
My soul, be on thy guard
Blow ye the trumpet, blow
I love to steal an hour away - From every cumbering care