

[Chaffee, Eliza Wells]

McGraw

MRS. ELIZA WELLS CHAFFEE

The Descendant of a Revolutionary Grandfather Has Passed Away.

Mrs. Eliza Wells Chaffee, widow of the late Thomas Bary [Barry] Chaffee, one of the most highly respected residents of this village, departed this life Sunday evening, Jan. 17, 1909, after an illness of seven weeks, which terminated in apoplexy on Saturday morning. Funeral services will be held at the home of her son, P. W. Chaffee, Wednesday afternoon at 2:30, Rev. W. D. Potter of Cortland officiating, assisted by Rev. A. M. Brown, pastor of the Presbyterian church of this village. Mrs. Chaffee's age was 91 years, 7 months and 7 days.

Eliza Wells Chaffee, who was the daughter of Robert W. and Betsy Reed Wells, was born at White Plains, N.Y., June 11, 1817, and came to Cortland with her parents in May, 1829. The family resided near the site of the old brick school house which her father helped to build. Here she attended school until the Female seminary was organized and here she finished her education. Meantime her father purchased the farm adjoining the one owned by the father of Judge Alton R. Parker, and as it was at that time covered with heavy timber, nearly all of the large timbers of the old Universalist church were gotten out on this farm.

On Dec. 26, 1838, Eliza Wells was united in marriage with Thomas B. Chaffee by Rev. Thomas Jefferson Whitcomb and shortly after removed to Owego, but later returned to Cortland, where they made their home until 1858, when they removed to this village. Four children were born to them—a little daughter who died in infancy and three sons, Thomas Jefferson, Morris Barry, and Pemos Wells Chaffee. Of these only the younger son, P. W. Chaffee, survives. Mr. Chaffee, who, during his life time was a cabinet make[r] of no mean skill, constructed many articles of furniture which are in almost perfect condition today. Among these is a set of flag bottom chairs, of which he constructed the frames and his wife wove the bottoms of flags, and a bed room set of mahogany finish. Until disabled by ill health Mr. Chaffee worked at his trade in the old Graves block in this village which was in recent years destroyed by fire. But on June 25, 1880 he departed this life and for over twenty years his widow remained in the house on Spring-st., where he left her, until it was thought best for all concerned that she remove to the home of her only son, where she has led an apparently happy life, busying herself with congenial work. She loved to talk of old times and among her cherished recollections is one of assisting to trim the new Universalist church in Cortland for the first Christmas festivities ever held there, the decorations being evergreens and the illuminations made by tallow candles.

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Mrs. Chaffee was never at loss for the date of any occurrence that transpired within her knowledge, and possessed a vast store of information on all subjects of interest which have transpired within the past seventy-five years.

She was very fond of reading and it has long been the custom of a circle of friends to bring her the best of the new books to read, and it was a great pleasure to listen to her shrewd criticisms of the books and their authors. Although always the most cheerful and sunny tempered imaginable and with every possible care and comfort that affection could devise on the part of her son and his wife, and her two daughters during the past few months, "grandma," as she was affectionately called by her friends[,] has often expressed the longing to "go home" and upon the occasion of the funeral of a dear friend of her former husband, the longing became almost unbearable and to a friend who went to remain with her for a short time she told how a few nights before she dreamed that she was walking down [t]he street toward her old home and water was flowing around her feet which steadily rose higher and higher until it came up to her shoulders, then in her dream she began to sing "I'll Journey On," and awakening she passed the remainder of the night in tears, thinking of the husband of her youth and of her children and friends who had gone before with whom she could scarcely wait to be reunited.

During her last illness her mind was perfectly clear and she dwelt much in the past[,] telling of her great grandfather, John Hillyard, a soldier of the war of the Revolution, whose family were prominent people in the vicinity of White Plains, before and after the war, and of her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. William Reed of Amenia, N.Y., and recalled many pleasing incidents of her frequent visits there where she sometimes met her cousins, Eliza and Althea Munson and of the fun they had in his roomy house three stories [sic] high in front with a wide porch fitted with seats around the sides and a big boulder near where they used to play. Memory even recalled the furnishings and carpets of the house, the carpets being woven of woolen yarn dyed in various colors. Of the two cousins who were her playmates, Eliza Munson afterward became the wife of Marcus McGraw and her father built the house of Main-st., now known as the Lamont Free library, Mr. Munson at one time owning large tracts of land in this vicinity and especially what is now the county farm.

During the past week her daughter-in-law has read her the articles concerning the Jubilee services at the Universalist church in Cortland and she would recall names and histories of the people who had passed almost from the memory of everyone else, telling incidents of their lives in the long ago. On June 10, 1907, there was a party given by Mr. and Mrs. P. W. Chaffee in honor of her 90th birthday of which The Standard printed at the time. Monday afternoon was decidedly the gala day for the elderly ladies of the village, although none of those assembled at the pleasant home of Mr. and Mrs. P. W.

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Chaffee in honor of the 90th birthday of their mother, Mrs. Eliza Wells Chaffee, could be called old, and the pretty rooms decorated with ferns and cut flowers and illuminated by the very soft light of ninety wax candles proved a very effective setting for the charming picture presented by the guests who were received at the door by Mr. and Mrs. P. W. Chaffee and were presented to Mrs. Eliza Wells by her two grandchildren, H. C. Chaffee and Mrs. Fanny Chaffee Russell.

Mrs. Chaffee, who in spite of the ninety years is erect and stately, was gowned in rich black silk and was seated in a Boston rocker made by her husband, Thomas B. Chaffee, about seventy years ago. This chair, which is well preserved like its owner, bears the distinction of being the first Boston rocker ever made in New York state and the back and arms are of mahogany. Early in their married life Mr. Chaffee saw the pattern of the chair in Auburn and decided that his wife should own one and, being a cabinet maker, [he] set himself to construct it with the result above mentioned.

After exchanging a few pleasant words with Mrs. Chaffee the guests were invited to the diningroom [sic], where choice refreshments were served by Mrs. Hattie Carpenter, Mrs. Fred P. Dunbar, Mrs. G. W. McGraw, Mrs. C. C. Hammond and Miss Gertrude Vincent, and each guest was presented with a beautiful pansy for remembrance.

A table in the enter of the parlor was loaded with elegant presents, several from friends and relatives unable to attend. Among the remembrances were finely illustrated gift books, articles in solid silver, a gold thimble, two fleecy white shawls, dainty hand made handkerchief, toilet articles and many other things. A handsome birthday book was placed on the writing desk and each guest in turn inscribed his name therein. A grandfather's clock in one corner of the room was banked with white flowers and ferns and solemnly measured off the hours. This clock, which is 76 years old, was purchased by Robert W. Wells, father of Mrs. Chaffee, when she was 14 years of age and differs from the clocks of the present day as all of the works are of wood. Notwithstanding its age it keeps good time and is as curious and handsome a piece of antique workmanship as is often seen.

Four generations of the family were present, Mrs. Eliza Wells Chaffee, and her son P. W. Chaffee, H. C. Chaffee and sister, Mrs. Fannie Chaffee Russell, children of another son, Thomas Jefferson Chaffee, deceased, and Lewis Merton and Webster Russell, children of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Russell.

At the time Rev. U. S. Milburn wrote:

My Dear Mrs. Chaffee, "Ninety years old next Monday and in possession of all your faculties. How good God has been to you and how much you have to be thankful for. So very few in the world have the privilege of celebrating the ninth decade of their birth that indeed it should not be passed by. If I were in Cortland, I would try to see you that day, but, so it is, I cannot. I shall,

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however, think of you and of our pleasant talks and will pray the good Father's blessing to rest upon you, as the sun quietly, serenely, lovingly sinks into the golden west."

The sun has gone down and beyond the mist of tears Mrs. Chaffee is at last reunited with her loved ones where there is no more pain neither any sorrow or crying, and though she will be greatly missed and sincerely mourned by her family and friends, they are comforted by the thought that their loss is her gain and the hope that all may in the fullness of time meet to part no more.

Besides her son, P. W. Chaffee, where she has made her home for the past 11 years, she is survived by one sister, Mrs. Willard Jeffs of Battle Creek, Mich.

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Transcribed on 25 Jan 1909 by Karen E. Dau of East Rochester, NY