

[Farnsworth, Oliver H.]

THE CLOSE OF AN INTERESTING LIFE

Oliver H. Farnsworth Passed Into the Great Beyond Tuesday

Boy Horse Lover, Cattle Buyer in West, Chased by Indians,
Travelling Man, Expert Accountant, His Last Years Were Restful

With perfect understanding Oliver H Farnsworth, while seriously ill at the Potsdam Hospital, remarked to a member of his family toward the last, "I am going home." Just a step along the highway the door stood open and waiting for him. He crossed the threshold Thursday night, and thus the good traveler came to his eternal rest. For him death held no sting. He was ready and welcomed it, for he had lived eighty-five years as interestingly, fully and wholesomely as a man could wish.

"Ol' Farnsworth," as he was best known by his friends, came from a Hermon family. Into his earlier years, about eight or ten of them, had been woven such thrilling adventures and experiences as would more than fill a normal life span. In direct contrast the remainder of his life was lived quietly and in comfort.

One little realized that the man who for so many years meticulously served as head bookkeeper at the First National Bank had once narrowly escaped from being scalped by a band of Indians on the western plains, being saved only by "the skin of his teeth" and the fleetness of his pinto pony. Those who had sat before him as candidates for the Masonic Blue Lodge and had listened to his lectures so beautifully expressed about the symbols and tokens of the Order, would hardly have recognized in him a former cattle dealer of the western plains in their wild and woolly days. In one respect, however, no person who had any knowledge of the game of billiards, and who once saw him handle a cue, ever doubted for one second that here was a master in the skill and technique of that exacting game.

Like his married life, which was of great joy and bliss, his interest and devotion to Free Masonry ran a very high parallel course. He joined the Hermon Blue Lodge about 187(6?), and his marriage to Miss Lillie Kelly of that community occurred in 1883. His home and his fraternity continued as his two chief interests in life, going hand-in-hand as long as those bonds remained unsevered. His wife died in 1929, and death alone separated him from his home Lodge at Hermon.

He was born at Hermon on October 16, 1855, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Almon Farnsworth. Even as a boy he was called upon to make some quick and sure decisions. His father was a farmer who raised many horses, including some fast ones. When the boy was only twelve years old a man came from Malone and purchased one of these horses, arranging to pay upon delivery in Malone. Even at this early age "Ol" had become an expert horseback rider, and his father started him off for Malone to deliver the horse on the appointed day. In those times the roads were "a fright" as "Ol" once described them in later years. He reached Malone but the purchaser was not in town. When the man arrived the next day he took the horse out and insisted that it had gone lame on the trip over, and proposed to pay only half the price agreed upon, as he thought that since he had a lad to deal with he could settle on his own terms, but the boy called in two or three real horsemen, who declared that the horse was not lame and this 12-year-old started back home with the money, the saddle and the bridle.

With characteristic humor he was wont to recall in later years that he was the only living person who had seen the interior of the original Blue Lodge rooms in Hermon, located on the third floor of the Matteson factory building, reached by an outside stairway. With some boyhood companions he had gained an entrance to the hall in what proved a vain search for the "goat" said to be kept in mysterious hiding. The late Omar A. Hine was a Hermon Mason of that time,

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1865, and little did the boy Oliver realize that more than half a century he and Omar were to travel as intimate friends and members of the craft.

While little more than a boy he learned to keep books in the Hermon stores and quickly developed into an expert penman. When seventeen he became a bookkeeper in a large furniture store at Pittsfield, Mass. Word from Senator Dolph S. Lynde, of Hermon, brought him back there to manage the Hermon store while the Senator was in Albany. In two years time he surrendered to a wanderlust which took him west, first to Iowa as a cattle buyer and from there to the Dakotas and Nebraska.

From cattle buying he drifted into banking, and from this into membership on the Chicago Grain Board of trade where he and a partner "cleaned up" and were later "cleaned out."

During his cattle buying days he went into Nebraska where he wished to locate and purchase a ranch but never did. Instead he had a brush with some Indians who sought his scalp. It was a hair raising episode. He had headed his pinto pony into the Elkhorn River district, and then rode 60 miles south, passing through an Indian reservation. Ignoring advice that the Indians were on the watch for lone riders he pushed along. About noon one day "six red devils" came riding down over the sage brush hill yelling and shooting at him. Then followed a race for life, lasting until after night-fall when he eluded and escaped from his pursuers after a 60-mile chase. In those days two six shooters worn at his hips were his constant companions.

It was while in Iowa that he became most skilled in playing billiards and won the championship for that part of the state. The tournament was a 1,000 point game in which his largest run was 177 points. With that delicate, soft touch, which only the most expert handlers of the cue acquire, he nursed the object balls around the table close to the cushion, winning the match by this long run.

Having had enough of cattle buying, close calls with Indians and getting "scalped" in the Chicago grain pit, he returned to Hermon where on October 24, 1883 he married Lillie Kelly, whose father, James Kelly, was Hermon's wagon manufacturer. With his brother Oliver [sic] Farnsworth, they opened a wood working plant at Williamstown, Oswego county for two years, turning out postoffice equipment. The mill burned and he returned to Hermon and went on the road, first as grocery salesman for the J. N. Crouse Company of Syracuse, and later for the St. Lawrence Wholesale Grocery Co., of Ogdensburg.

He and Mrs. Farnsworth came to make Canton their home in 1899. In 1904, following a critical illness, he retired as a travelling salesman and became office manager for six years for James Spears. Then in 1912 he accepted the position of head bookkeeper at First National Bank, a position he held until after his wife's death in 1929.

It was before Mr. and Mrs. Farnsworth came here that her widowed sister, Mrs. Eva Beswick, died in their home, leaving a three-week-old daughter, Mary. The Farnsworths kept the little girl and brought her up. She is now Mrs. M. S. Kronheim, of Vineland, N.J., who arrived here with her husband and their son April 1st.

In recent years Mr. Farnsworth had made his home in this village, living for a time at his Jay street home, later closing this and living on Court street. Much of his time was spent either at The Club, of which he had long been a member, or at the Masonic Club.

He greatly enjoyed companionship. A game of pinochle or pitch helped pass away the hours—or there were always the billiard tables, and he was frequently found alone, cue in hand, practicing some of his favorite shots over and over again. He was probably the most accomplished billiard player Canton ever had, being a master at that game.

Through his active interest in Free Masonry he made a distinct contribution to the lives of many others. He was raised a Mason in the Blue Lodge at twenty-one and had continued to remain a member of that Lodge. He had many interesting experiences in connection with Masonry. One he considered the most colorful was when he was in the west and was

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requested to appear before an old Indian chief, who by Masonic signs proved that he was a Mason, and it later transpired that within the Indian tribe a Masonic Lodge had been established. Needless to say there was one tribe of which Mr. Farnsworth had no fear. On another occasion when in desperate need of food and shelter, it was the fraternal bond which came to his rescue.

Without question he was the oldest member of Hermon. He joined St. Lawrence Chapter No. 132 R.A.M. and St. Lawrence Commandery No. 28, K.T., and no man knew the Masonic ritual better than he. He was the oldest Past Eminent Commander of the St. Lawrence Commandery, having served in that office during the 1888-1889 term...

To have witnessed the exemplification of a Masonic ritual in which Oliver Farnsworth took part was never to be forgotten. He was a man who had mastered the fine art of doing the work perfectly and beautifully. His life was a living symbol of Free Masonry. His lectures to candidates would have done credit to a trained orator, and they were always rendered with a depth of feeling which marked his sincerity. It was as though the craftsman had taken a rough stone and made smooth and polished its sides and edges.

Mr. Farnsworth was the loyal friend to people and institutions. He lived those principles he taught to others. His interest in the communities of Canton and Hermon remained staunch. He was a member of the Canton Universalist Church, and of The Club. A brother, Theron, for many years one of the leading citizens of Camden, N.Y., died only recently. The niece, Mrs. Mary Kronheim, his sister-in-law, Mrs. Ceylon Chaney, and several nephews survive.

The funeral was held Thursday afternoon at the Russell Lawrence undertaking parlors, where many of Mr. Farnsworth's friends gathered to listen to the touching words of his life-long friend, Dr. Richard Eddy Sykes. The body of this friend of all was taken to Hermon where the committal service was conducted by the Hermon Lodge F. & A. M..

The bearers were Sir Knights Dr. F. F. Williams, H. R. Frair, Lyle Huntress of Canton and Eminent Commander [Donny of St. Lawrence ___? Lytle?], both of Potsdam. Others who attended from Canton besides the family were Sir Knights W. W. Hale, William Mead and Elton Wood.

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Transcribed on 24 Feb 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY