

[Payson, Florence Bassett]

FAREWELL TRIBUTE TO MRS. PAYSON

Funeral Services Held Monday from Her Home  
Death Brings to a Close a Long and Beautiful Life

As one who heard "Hark the Herald Angels Come" sung out upon the air, and with Christmas but two days off, eternal peace came to Mrs. Flora Bassett Payson, wife of Dr. James M. Payson, early Friday morning. It was as though Christmas was beckoning her to a new world, and as Dr. Sykes said at the service Monday afternoon, "calling her to a new and immortal life."

Her death had been expected almost hourly for several days, as she and Dr. Payson both lay ill in their Court street home. The end came peacefully. A beautiful life had entered upon a new adventure.

Monday afternoon many friends gathered at the home for a last farewell. Rev. Hugh S. Tigner, pastor of the church she and Dr. Payson loved so dearly, and Dr. Richard Eddy Sykes, a life-long friend, officiated. The body was placed in the chapel at Fairview Cemetery to await burial in the spring.

On Saturday Dr. Payson acceded to the wishes of his friends not to attempt to accompany the cortege to the cemetery, "but I shall sit beside her during the funeral," he said. And rising from his sick bed he did so.

Aside from the years when Dr. and Mrs. Payson lived at Sherman, N.Y., Rochester, Minn., and Lacrosse, Wis., in which three places he served his earlier years in the ministry, Mrs. Payson had always resided here in Canton. Her people had come here with the early settlers, and were among the pillars of the Universalist church in this village when it was founded. It was at Sherman, N.Y. that she joined the Order of Eastern Star, and throughout their 64 years of joyful and happy married life she and Dr. Payson always took an interested and active part in the Masonic orders.

Few men and women are privileged to have lived such useful, such long and worthy lives as Dr. and Mrs. Payson, lives in which there was such a mingling of mutual interests. They shared with others that which was theirs, both in the material things and the spiritual. With understanding they shared the sorrows and joys of them. From the goodness of their hearts they gave help to many, more than one young man and woman having received aid from them in starting out in life or in securing an education. To others their lives proved an inspiration.

Their fondness for children led them to adopt two: a boy and a girl upon whom they bestowed the love and kindness of parents. The death of their adopted daughter Clara was a great sorrow. Mrs. Payson loved dumb animals and the things which nature grew. About her home one always found her pets, and the beauty of flowers.

## [Payson, Florence Bassett]

It was 87 years ago this year, on June 20, 1851, that Flora Bassett was born in what is now known as the Lassell house on Gouverneur street. The Bassett family had even then been residents of Canton many years, for they had come here when Mrs. Payson's father, Elijah, was a boy of sixteen. Elijah's father, a Vermonter, had moved to Jay, Essex county, where Elijah was born. Elijah had nine brothers and sisters: Nelson, Harry, Rufus, Orlin, Amanda, Elvira, Rexanna, Hannah and Lorinda. Five of these children lived to manhood and womanhood and settled in Canton. Of them the Misses Hannah and Lorinda will be remembered as seamstresses and dressmakers who for many years conducted their business in the old Bassett home on Court street, and later lived and died in the Payson home.

Elijah Bassett became a prosperous and influential citizen of this village. As a young man he learned the Blacksmith trade under Walter Brown, who with Isaac Cornell, Zura Lewis, Lute Sherman, Homer Bailey, and the Jacksons, Ezra and his son Theron, were smithies of that time. It is within the memory of the present generation when Walter Brown's two daughters, the Misses Ann and Emma, resided in the old home which still stands on Riverside Drive next beyond the Stanley Cornell home.

But though Elijah Bassett passed through an apprenticeship and became a partner of Walter Brown, it was not for long. For a time he operated his own smithy shop.

In 1841 Elijah Bassett had married Harriet Rice of Canton. Rev. Wagner performed the ceremony in the old Universalist church. The bride was a niece of Mr. Waterman from whom Waterman Hill gets its name. In 1864 Elijah and family moved to West Potsdam where he had purchased what is now the Tyrus McKim farm. Five years later he returned to this village, where Mr. Bassett purchased a home on Court street and in 1874 the farm on which the State School now stands, and where Elijah's son-in-law, Dr. Payson, served so long and with such distinction as teacher and officer of the school during its first twenty-five years.

The little white early American colonial Bassett home stood on Court street, now the site of the High School. After Elijah purchased the State School farm he sold this Court street place to his nephew, Dr. John Bassett, son of Nelson, who as a farmer lived on the Miner street road at what has long been known as Bassett's woods.

It was not long after the family moved back here from West Potsdam that the young man James Milford Payson, arrived from Maine to enter the Theological School, fell in love with Flora Bassett, who with her people were devoted members of the Universalist church. Their marriage took place June 13, 1874, and almost immediately they left for Sherman, N.Y., where the young minister was to begin his life's work. Of those who attended the

[Payson, Florence Bassett]

wedding several are still living: Miss Inez Jones, Miss Carrie Storrs, Mrs. Abbie Martin, Mrs. Carrie Jackson Sawyer, and others.

Mrs. Payson's life from 1874 on was devoted to her husband and his long period in the ministry and as an educator. Mrs. Payson was in every sense the minister's wife and helpmate. At Sherman, at Rochester, Minn., at Lacrosse, Wis., and when they returned to Canton where he became pastor she gave generously of her time and interest in church work. For many years she was in charge of the kindergarten department of the Canton church, was the mainstay of the Young People's Christian Union, and ever active in the Ladies' Circle and Mission Circle. Though illness and failing health had many years ago largely confined her to the home duties, it was remarkable how closely she kept in touch with the church affairs.

Mrs. Payson possessed an unusual mind. Only this past summer and fall the writer enjoyed two long visits with her and the Doctor. On each occasion Mrs. Payson delved back into Canton history, and with unerring memory recalled many names of other days, dates and incidents. Even though suffering a long period of invalidism due to the injury received when she fell and fractured her hip, Mrs. Payson maintained a keen interest in world affairs and was one of those women who seemed always able to keep in close contact with the life of the village and its affairs.

Her life was bound up in the work and life of her husband. His comfort and well being were her first concern, and for 64 years they lived happily and contentedly. Their good works will live after them in the hearts of hundreds of people.

Surviving are her husband, Rev. Dr. James M. Payson, aged 90; an adopted son Clarence Payson, of [missing text]; Cyrus Bassett of Madrid and Milford Bassett of Rochester.

*St. Lawrence Plaindealer, Canton NY, Tue. 27 Dec 1938*

Transcribed on 28 Feb 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY