

They Marched to a Different Drummer

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Edwards has had, on occasion, residents who are remembered for their eccentricities, from the fellow who always took a workman's lunch pail to the community public suppers and filled it with leftovers to take home for later, thereby earning the nickname "Dinnerpail" (aka H. Grant), to the lady who preferred to live the life of a vagabond rather than occupy a permanent home.

This independent woman, Melissa McComber, loved to wander the area at her own pace visiting with her acquaintances and staying the night at homes where she knew she was welcome. One of the homes where she always planned to spend a night or two was the farmhouse of Will and Jen Watson in the South Edwards area. She was visiting the Watsons one time when their daughter, Hazel, was a baby. Will asked, "Meliss', want to hold the baby?"

Her answer was, "I'd rather hold a rattlesnake!"

This tickled the funnybone of Will who always appreciated comments he found humorous and he told and retold the story until it became part of the family legends.

And then there was "August". The man known as August came to Edwards as a single, older man in the mid-1920's and lived in a third floor apartment over Hermy Beach's hardware store on Main St.

Very little is known of him except what was printed in his obituary, the circumstances of his death and his sparse death record.

He came to Edwards with a road work crew, stayed and worked in the mines for a time. Later he only had odd jobs to support himself.

He did not enter into the social life of the village very much in the seven years he was a resident, but stated he had been born in Holland. He was supposed to be married, but his wife never came to Edwards to be with him and it isn't known whether or not he had any children.

On Thursday afternoon, April 13, 1933, about 3:30 the firemen were called to the building housing Beach's hardware store and could see August in the front window of his upstairs apartment. However, soon he was overcome with smoke. A ladder was put up to the window and Dr. Adams was asked to climb up to help the old man. The doctor started up, but came down saying he couldn't do it because of the smoke and fire. Someone else managed to get up to the third floor through the back entrance and dragged August to a nearby roof where a pulmotor was sent for, but nothing could be done to save him and his body was taken to the J. N. McLeod undertaking rooms.



L - R - Will Chapin - His grocery store on HIS left, In center is August - Laborer in town on railroad, George Morrow - section boss on NYCRR.

The obituary states that August had just carried up some provisions and had come back for kerosene oil. When the fire was discovered it was thought at first he had started the fire that way, but later the oil was found intact.

His full name and birthplace were located through his death certificate and found to be Augustin Neddenzer, born in Germany about 75 years before. It indicates he had been in Edwards seven years where he lived a quiet life, died an accidental death and was buried on April 16, 1933 in Fairview Cemetery. One picture exists of him, the only likeness of the man known as "August".



In the late 1890's in the Pleasant Valley section of Edwards lived an older man in a small house that probably should be classified as a "shack", but it satisfied a rather hermit type man who is another mystery to present day residents.

Why Shepard Keyes came to Edwards to spend his retirement years is not known, but he bothered no one and allowed the Pleasant Valley school children to come to get drinking water from his well. When he could no longer live alone he went to live with the Tom Sullivan family.

In the Edwards History Center is a tattered memento (donated by Ethel Cleland) of a man believed to be from the city, but preferred to spend his golden years in a small town in Northern New York. What was his earlier life like that he needed a bank bag, presumably for money or some type of savings?

An Italian immigrant, familiarly known only by his given name, Dominic, lived on outer Main Street in a small house he bought 9 July 1930 from Lura Gordon and Lutheria Moore. The census record of 1925 lists his immigration date as 1910. At that time he would have been 20 years old. The census also records that he was a lodger at the hotel at mines where he was a laborer at the zinc mill. The hotel referred to was probably the boarding house across the road from the zinc mines and built especially for the foreign workers because of ethnic discrimination at the original hotel on mine property.



As an older man he was frequently seen with a burlap bag over his shoulder walking to Woodcock's (later Lumley's) mill to scavenge coal that had fallen from the train car. He would take his find home to use for fuel to heat his house. He was not in the habit of washing his hands very often so during blackberry season when he tried to peddle the berries to the villagers, he would show the size and condition of his produce, which he carried in pint glass jars, with grimy fingers!

He lived very simply, planting a garden for fresh vegetables on his quarter acre, but when he needed supplies he would go to Bob Ferry's store to make his purchases and in a humorous manner say to the clerk, "I want a bushel o' money, bushel o' money".

Dominic lived independently for many years then two local men who looked after his needs in later years were Joe Manzolati and Albert Rotundo.

Dominic's death certificate was obtained from the Ogdensburg Vital Statistics office. It revealed that his full name was Dominic Scambelione, born 15 November 1890 in Italy to Joseph and Rose Gamellen. He became a citizen of USA and had a Social Security card. He had lived at the Ogdensburg Psychiatric Center for 6 years 6 months and 7 days due to heart problems, senile psychosis and simple deterioration. His date of death was 17 August 1968. He was then buried in St. Mary's Cemetery in Ogdensburg on 19 August 1968 having lived as he wanted in small town Edwards, USA.

Maye Whitford, descendant of some of the early settlers of South Edwards, was the daughter of Frank and Eleanor Havens Whitford. She was born 31 January 1887 and was an independent woman before Women's Lib became a popular cause. She never married, was a teacher, office worker, and foster mother to her brother's two daughters.

She was a person of many talents, some of which are usually not attributed to a woman, such as being a capable carpenter - and building her own house (where Dick and Doris Rushlo live).



Ecology, conservation, and exercise were some of her interests in a day when the idea had to come from personal practiced them in a practical manner. She pulled weeds along the roadside as she walked the five miles each way to and from work each day, preferring the hike to a car.

In later years, she traveled extensively and finally retired to live with her niece, Mrs. Eleanor Austin, until her death in 1972.

Rev. Ure Gordon Mitchell was born in Scotland, but immigrated with four other youths, to the United States when he was only fifteen years old. Even at that age he began to show his ability to sway the public to his way of thinking. He somehow persuaded the administration of a school in Clinton, NY to enroll him in their school with tuition, food, room, and clothes cost free. After 18 months he came to Edwards where he stayed with James Wilson and then enrolled in the Canton Theological School. Again, he was able to get his education without any cost.



His personality was a hindrance to him in both his religious and personal life as he very seldom had anything good to say on any subject from the weather to children.

Whenever he stayed in Edwards he lived with Frank Cook in a tarpaper covered house on Middle Street (aka First St) next door to William and Olive Brown. One day Mrs. Brown happened to be outdoors at the same time as Rev. Mitchell and she commented, "It's a nice day". In his usual surly voice, Mitchell replied, "Tell me something I don't know."

He traveled extensively and took pictures of his travels to show to paying audiences. It appears he hadn't paid for the projector he used and the creditor asked the local constable, Eddie Beach, to recover it for him. However, the law only allowed the projector to be confiscated if Mitchell set it down. He went to the depot and, while trying to purchase ticket for a trip to Canada, he set the projector on the floor. The ever ready constable was there and grabbed the projector! Mitchell brought his heavy cane down on Constable Beach's head, splitting it wide open!

Mitchell always carried the heavy cane, and as shown, didn't mind using it if he thought the occasion warranted it. He didn't like children and was known to chase them in an attempt to hit the culprits with his cane. (Possibly the boys were teasing him). Sometimes he didn't need a reason and if a child climbed the steps at the Post Office on Maple Ave. the same time as Mitchell, he would try to hit innocent child with his infamous cane.

Another time, when Earl Noble was a small child he went with his father to Mitchell's house. While waiting for his father, Earl absentmindedly slid the sturdy iron door latch across once or twice. Mitchell admonished him, "Don't play with the latch, boy, you're liable to break it."

One day Frank Cayea was working in the basement of the Grange Hall across from Padgett's store. Charlie Lennox' father, Fred, came out of Padgett's store with an ice cream cone and Mitchell happened to be coming out just ahead of him. As they walked across the street, Frank called out from the cellarway, "Hello Mr. Mitchell you old S.O.B." Mitchell thought Lennox had said it and he turned and hit Lennox over the head with his cane, causing Lennox to push his ice cream cone into his own face!

There are quite a few more stories relating the exploits of "Old Man Mitchell" as he walked the streets of Edwards village carrying his cane because of his stiff leg, and exhibiting his unfriendly temperament until his death in 1940. However, these memories show that he truly "marched to a different drummer."