

Tribute to Clarissa Leavitt Sturtevant

Burlington, Vermont, Tuesday, September 21, 2004

Tomorrow, we will dedicate a memorial to Clarissa Leavitt, whose burial spot is in Lyndonville, Vermont. Clarissa is of special interest to me and I am honored to introduce you to her.

Clarissa Leavitt was born to Jeremiah and Sarah Sturtevant Leavitt in Hatley Quebec. She was the third born of their children. Her first sister, Mary Ann, died at birth. Her second sister, Louisa was born in January 20, 1820. Clarissa came ten months later, November 16, 1820.

Clarissa is the family mystery. All that we know of her life has been sleuthed by tenacious searchers, driven by a compassionate interest, in this girl whose life seems to have been deprived of many of the gifts we cherish most. Especially we feel a sense of sadness that she was the only person in her immediate family, left behind at age 16, when all the other members of her family left Hatley, Quebec, headed west. And that Clarissa may have had no contact with her immediate family after that time. Her father died along the way. Her mother and her siblings, though they successfully completed their journey, were consumed by the grueling requirements of colonizing an untamed land.

Perhaps Clarissa matured early and spread her wings much sooner than her parents would approve. But whatever happened, Clarissa is not mentioned in any family writings that have been discovered to this date. Most notably, she is not mentioned in the eloquent expressions of her mother, Sarah Sturtevant Leavitt, from whom we gain so much of what we know.

Sarah Sturtevant Leavitt wrote of the birth of Mary Ann and of her early death. She wrote of Louisa, her illness and her choice to accompany the family on their long journey west, when a wealthy aunt, strongly entreated her to stay.

But in Sarah's record there is no mention of Clarissa.

These are the things we know of Clarissa.

There is no account of her having accompanied her family from Hatley. She was probably already living across the border in the home of the Lemuel Sturtevant family.

At a very young age, perhaps fourteen or fifteen, she was married to her first cousin, Horace Sturtevant. Horace is the son of Lemuel Sturtevant Jr., Sarah's brother. He and his wife, Zilpha Cory Sturtevant, lived in Barton, Orleans, Vermont. Research indicates that Horace was their only child.

Horace and Clarissa are found there in the 1840 Census, and again in the 1850 Census. In the household are Clarissa and Horace, as well as Lemuel and Zilpha Cory Sturtevant. The 1850 Census includes a girl of 15 whose name is Clarissa M. Her last name is not

legible, but it is definitely not Sturtevant. Was there a child born to Clarissa? We do not know. It is the only time the child appears, insofar as we have been able to ascertain. She may have been a boarder, but her positioning in the record suggests that she could be a child of Horace and Clarissa.

In 1850, Horace is listed as a farmer, with property valued at \$1400, which is about average in his neighborhood. Others live in the same household, including Lemuel and Zilpha, Horace's parents.

By 1860, Horace and Clarissa live in a household occupied only by themselves, Lemuel and Zilpha and one domestic servant. Their personal property value has increased some.

Horace was called to service in the Civil War, in the Vermont Infantry, Company D.

The 1870 Census-taker found Horace, age 54, Clarissa, age 49, now with their personal fortunes considerably diminished. They now have no real estate, and small personal property. Clarissa is keeping the house, that includes four boarders, and Horace is designated now as a farm laborer.

Sometime after 1870, Horace died, he would have been less than 55 years of age. We do not have a date of his death, we only assume that he died, because in 1873 we find Clarissa marrying a widower, seventeen years her senior.

At the time of his marriage to Clarissa Leavitt Sturtevant, Simon Colton had suffered significant personal trials. He has been widowed, after 42 years of marriage. His only two children have died young. He has only one grandchild.

Simon Colton died November at age 81. Clarissa lived ten years more.

At Clarissa's grave at Lyndonville Cemetery, a broken stone reads: "Clarissa, wife of Simon Colton, Born November 16, 1820. Died April 30, 1894. Asleep in Jesus."

Tomorrow we will place a stone that, in a very real sense, reclaims Clarissa. It will give her whole name. It will tell something of her story. Most of all it will symbolize that she is ours.

Thank you.