

SYLVANDALE (PART 2)

Anita West was terribly homesick during her time teaching in Sylvandale in 1913-1914. Fortunately, she found a good friend in Miss Ada Powell, the teacher in the "East District School", which I believe was at the corner of what is today Shady Lane and County Route 51. The high point of the fall was the time Anita spent with her sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Milton Dunham. Anita traveled to Stuyvesant Falls, where Milton was school principal, for a visit early in November, and then again at Thanksgiving. They visited with her at least once at Sylvandale, staying at a place called Sylvandale Cottage.

Surely, Anita knew some hill people from around Windham, but she had never seen anybody quite like the Carmans, the family with whom she lived that school year. Years later, she wrote "I wish I had taken a picture of our first trip to church (in Medway). The Carman 'team' was one cute little horse, full of life, and another big, boney farm horse that would make almost two of the little ones. These two were hitched to a high buckboard, open two-seated wagon with the biggest wheels I had ever seen on anything. Mr. Carman was a little man and he wore his best suit ... a swallow-type coat, farm shoes and a derby ... Mrs. Carman was slightly taller, weighing around two hundred ... (to get her into the wagon) Mr. Carman had some contraption so she could walk half way up and with a boost for the rest, she made it. I have seen many funny things in movies and elsewhere but I still think that outfit would take first place." (It is very possible that the Carmans were living in Mrs. Carman's family home. Her maiden name Bagley appears on the 1867 map on the site of what was later the Carman house south of the Sylvandale four corners.)

Every day for lunch Mrs. Carman packed Anita's tin lunch pail with "two baking powder biscuits each cut in half with salmon between and that was it." Thankfully, Anita enjoyed her

students. "I laughed a lot with them and played games at recess. There were some really poor families and some very well organized farms and they all got along well together." Once a month she had to walk a mile each way to the school trustee for her pay of \$48.00.

Close to Christmas, Anita hired a horse and buggy for one dollar from the Winn family and drove with Ada to New Baltimore Station, "a tiny little place with a tiny little store, post office and a few houses." She brought back gifts for the Christmas party at school. "That trip meant as much to me as a trip to Europe."

Anita spent two weeks with her family during the holiday break. Her boyfriend Ferris was home from his studies at Albany Business College as well. It was during this time, Anita remembered, "that I knew Ferris was the one."

The people of Sylvandale were settling in for the winter. The Sylvandale column in the Recorder reported on December 26, "W. Garrett is the first to have his wood pile sawed up." Three "farm boys" joined the school in January, "each one taller than I...I made room for one good class for them and a study period." The rest of the time they tutored the young children, coached at games at recess, and "did many things that needed to be done to make the room better." Those boys went back to the farm the first of March.

By the end of January, "Several of the men from here work on the ice at New Baltimore," said the Recorder. In early February, men from the neighborhood filled E.B. Carman's ice house, "with fine sixteen-inch ice."

On February 14 came a heavy snowfall.

The Recorder February 27: "Ever since the blizzard E.B. Carman and his men have toiled early and late to keep the highways open, and when they stop for rest and sleep, the wind fills the cuts again. Miss Ada Powell's school is closed on account of bad weather."

On March 1, came more snow, the largest snowfall since 1888.

March 20: "It is almost impossible to keep (the roads) passable."

April 10: "The roads are opened at last."

Poor weather continued into the spring. In the first week of May, "scarcely any oats sown yet."

Anita returned to New Baltimore Station a second time in May, and bought deviled ham and "store" bread for sandwiches for a picnic out on the school grounds.

The last day of school, June 6, was time for the students to clean their desks, sweep and scrub, and "listen to the memories of the school year. I really was reluctant to say Goodbye as I watched each child walk over the hill."

The anonymous Sylvandale correspondent wrote of Anita West "it has been her first year of teaching, at which she was most successful. She is well-liked and has made many friends in the place." (Also that week: "E.B. Carman is hatching chickens for A. Flansburg.") Anita returned to Windham. In 1916 she married Ferris Thompson, had a son who died as a baby and five daughters, and went to work managing the Thompson family's boarding house, later a resort known as the Thompson House. She never taught school again.

With the consolidation of schools went the Sylvandale school district. Sylvandale lost its identity, with the exception of the cemetery and the operation for many years of Camp Bohonton, a summer retreat for kids from a black Presbyterian church in New York City, on Shady Lane just south of the Albany County border.

Emma Carman died in 1927 at age 62, her husband Emer died in 1955 at age 95. They are buried in the Sylvandale Cemetery just east of the intersection of the old Sylvandale Road and Alcove Road.

Ferris Thompson died in 1969. While in her 80s, Anita wrote in long-hand her memoirs which she titled "An Orange Was for Christmas". She worked seven days a week at the Thompson House until she was 88. Anita West Thompson died in 1988 at age 94.

"They were the best parents and example any child could ever hope for" Mrs. Mickey Goettsche wrote me.

Ted Hilscher