

Greene County Gleanings

by Raymond Beecher

The distribution of locally printed New Year's Addresses in doggerel rhyme was a common practice for several decades during the 19th century. Some were called Carriers' Addresses since local newspapers printed them up for the newsboys to give out at the end of the year. The purpose was to remind the subscriber that a tip was the normal expectation. The composed verses were frequently written around a special theme, sometimes of local input. Other individuals occasionally followed suit as did Sexton John Lorton, age 35 years, of the First Presbyterian Church in Durham, NY. Both his printed address and genealogical information has come from Mrs. Harriet Rasmussen, Greenville. There is no identification of the local printer but the surviving 1856 item measures 16x9¼ inches with decorative heading and border. Part One contains 10 stanzas and there are 6 in Part Two. A few are quoted below.

I'll tell you something not amiss,
It's what a Sexton's duty is.
To keep the church both clean and neat,
And see that strangers have a seat,
To ring the bell and make the fires,
And light the church when it requires,
To see that order is observed,
That all may hear the Preacher's

word,

And not allow mischievous boys
Disturbing church by hideous noise.
A Sexton should appear quite neat,
And be polite to all he meets,
And then no trouble he will find,
To suit the most fastidious mind.

Next, Sexton Lorton praises the qualities of Pastor Smith, a greatly beloved man whose preaching "all can understand." A new stanza comments on the village of Durham where "we have people too of different grades. The Ladies here, God bless their souls, With village life they seem consoled. No Bloomers here, to dress hooped." (The last line above quoted refers to the radical adoption of the bloomer outerwear costume by some females in the period just prior to the Civil War.)

As to merchants, Lorton continues his lines mentioning the Humphrey's store opened last spring, the sign of Peck & More's, the furniture of David Cowles and also that of one Hitchcock. Next came Norton the waggon, cart and sleigh maker. That line was followed by Pierce the painter for both signs and buildings. Boots and shoes were the specialty of Spencer "For Spencer's boots, I have no doubt, Will wear a man his lifetime out. Whittlesley knows where he is at, He will fit your top-knot to a Hat. The Finch girls all are things

in their line of Millinery you will find."

The professional men also merited Lorton's attention in verse eight. First came Dr. Cowles who earned high praise, then lawyers Winans and Mattice as well as Baldwin.

Part Two in six stanzas is devoted to prayers for Lorton's readers and his wishes for a peaceful and prosperous New Year. He identifies it as his first Annual Address.

The Bible record of John Lorton indicates he was born at New York City on Sept. 9, 1820 while his wife Elsie Maria Mott's date is noted as January 29, 1829. The two were married July 2, 1846. Of their children, one was born at Athens, one at Windham, one at West Durham and five at Durham itself. Death came to John Lorton on December 8, 1896 between 2 and 5 a.m., age 76 years. His wife, Elsie M. died the following year. Both are buried in Durham Union Cemetery. His tombstone revealed Civil War service in Company A, 95th Regt. New York Volunteers.

The Vedder Memorial Library has a collection of these New Year's Addresses but this is the only one in its holdings written by a church sexton.

Genevieve 12/29/94