THE REMINISCENCES OF ROSWELL HENRY WELLS

1853 - 1942

Edited by
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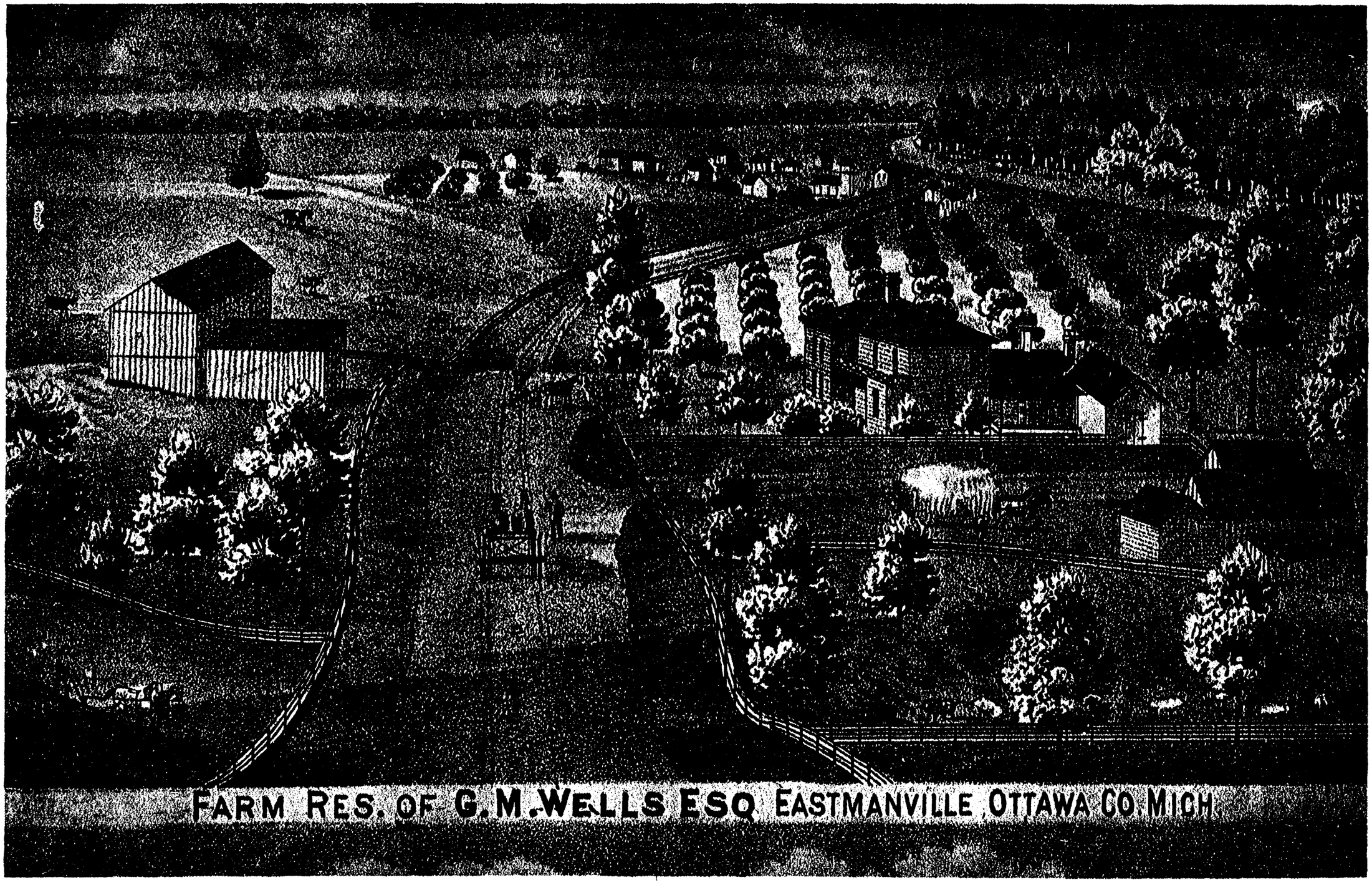

FARM RES. OF G.M.WELLS ESQ. EASTMANVILLE, OTTAWA CO. MICH.

FOREWORD

These Reminiscences of Roswell Henry Wells are inspiring as an embodiment of the spirit of self-reliance that carried America through its pioneering period to the industrial strength it enjoys today. The reader will see that it never crossed Wells' mind to seek assistance or aid from anyone, least of all from a governmental agency. His life spanned the last period of farm pioneering in Michigan. Michigan and farming as he knew it are no more. As time goes on, people like Wells and the others of his era will seem increasingly remarkable.

This narrative of the life and times of Roswell Henry Wells was written when he was 88 years old, but still vigorous and anxious to be doing something productive. It was written for his enjoyment and pleasure of his family and friends, not for publication. Written entirely from memory and as events presented themselves to his mind, it is remarkable how accurate the stated facts were found to be when checked. Some corrections, however, were necessary, but have not been indicated: punctuation was standardized and spellings of place names were changed to conform to contemporary usage. Coopersville, e.g., in his time was past known without the "s". Events have been rearranged in their presentation so that similar ones have been grouped together and placed in chronological order as far as possible. Also, only those things that Wells personally saw or participated in were included.

The Editors are to be commended for so manfully resisting footnoting beyond a bare minimum. They found it difficult not to share with the reader such bits of knowledge that Cronk Beer was a soft drink extremely popular in the Midwest during the fifties of the last century. The reader has not been given much historical information about places mentioned by the author. Anyone interested in further knowledge about Eastmanville, Lamont, etc., are urged to read about them in the "History of Muskegon and Ottawa Counties, Michigan", (H.R. Page and Company, Chicago, 1883) as well as in other sources available in public libraries and elsewhere. Family relationships of people mentioned, if any, are to be found in the genealogical data at the end of the reminiscences. Carrie Gladel, e.g., "who fell in the lake," married Roswell's brother, George.

In a way, this publication is the result of a communal effort in that it was possible only because several public-spirited people made their time, effort, and money available.

It is hoped that this narrative of a well-spent and admirable life will prove of interest and inspiration to many, particularly young Americans who live on a frontier of their own.

In any case, all of us should be conscious of, and grateful to, those like the Wells family who prepared the way for the life we enjoy today.

Alexis A. Praus

Ruth M. Howard

INTRODUCTION

The following story relating some of the events of his boyhood and youth was written by my father, Roswell H. Wells in the 88th year of his life. I, the oldest of his ten children, feel a deep sense of gratification in writing this introduction. He was visiting at the home of my sister, Lillian, and many times had expressed a desire for some activity to help give more meaning to his daily life. Lillian suggested that he write some of the tales which he often related about his boyhood. As you read father's story, you will realize that he spent the greater part of his life working very hard. It was this drive to keep busy that led him to write this account.

Father was born in 1853 when our Country was experiencing some of its most severe growing pains, when there was a great need for men of his caliber, men who were willing to accept almost any challenge.

Father went to work with paper and pencil and as you may well imagine, it took quite a number of years to decipher what he wrote and to obtain the correct meaning of some of his statements.

Mother was much younger than father, he being forty-two years old when I was born and sixty-five when my youngest brother, Lawrence E. was born, so to the younger members of our family, he was more like a grandfather, but no matter what his age, we were always fascinated by the many stories of his early life in Michigan.

One aspect of the pioneering spirit which he continued through his life was the open-door-policy. The latchstring was always out at our home and he and mother made everyone welcome.

My sisters and brothers join me in sharing with you this narrative which we enjoyed hearing father tell many times throughout his life.

Irene E. Wells
Grand Rapids, Michigan

THE REMINISCENCES OF ROSWELL HENRY WELLS

1853-1942

I was born in the year 1853 in the State of New York, near Penn Yan, on the banks of Crooked Lake. When about twenty-five years of age, I revisited my babyhood home. The house was L-shaped and I thought it most beautiful.

All of my father's people were born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, while my mother's came from central New York State.[1] In my father's family there were six boys and seven girls while my mother's consisted of four boys and two girls. I never saw Grandfather [David] Burroughs Wells because he died soon after we moved to Michigan. Grandmother's name was Annie. My Grandfather, on mother's side, was David Coleman. Grandmother Coleman's name was Mary Ann.

Grandfather Coleman chewed tobacco. He was a very excitable man. Grandmother was a very neat woman and kept everything shining. One day when I was 16 she had just blacked her stove and it shone. The hearth was open and he tried to spit into it but missed and splattered all over the stove. She said, "Oh, David!" If anything hurt her feelings she would cry. This time she turned to walk away. He saw he had hurt her feelings so he took the cover off the stove, threw the tobacco from his mouth and his tobacco pouch into the fire and said, "I'll never chew again." He put his arms around her and said, "Polly." (He always called Grandmother Polly, though her name was Mary.) That cured him of that habit. He never touched tobacco again.

Grandfather Coleman was of Irish and Scottish descent while Grandmother Coleman was German and French. Grandfather Wells was of Scottish ancestry and his wife was English. So I guess I am a "Yankee Squaw Dutchman," as father called mother.

How old my father and mother were when they were married I cannot say, but I was the first product of their union. Soon after their marriage father went to seek his fortune in California, going in February of 1853. He and my Uncles Henry and Roswell went together via the Isthmus of Panama. Father worked as a foreman on the ranch of his cousin, John Wells. I was born six months after he left and mother wrote him that he had better come home as he now had a son.

We came to Michigan through Detroit in 1854. From that city Uncle Rodney Seymour, who drove one of the first stagecoaches between the two cities, took us to Kalamazoo by stage.[2] Father and Grandfather Coleman each bought a lot side by side in Kalamazoo. Grandfather was a carpenter and joiner by trade and they built a house for each family.

1. See genealogical record, pages 17, 18 and 19.
2. Stage coaches continued to run for 23 years after the railroad reached Kalamazoo in 1846. The Kalamazoo Gazette, January 24, 1937, section 1, page 10.

When I was little I was deathly afraid of organ-grinders. They would go from house to house with an organ and a monkey with a tin cup for pennies. Grandmother Coleman wore big hoop skirts. Whenever an organ-grinder came around I would hide under her dress because I felt pretty safe there.

Father soon bought a span of horses and peddled Cronk Beer and other soft drinks to taverns on the plank road running from Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids. He would go to Grand Rapids one day and return the next. Generally, he took freight of some kind back to Kalamazoo.

When I was five or six [1858], father traded the house and lot in Kalamazoo for a farm in Eastmanville. He got a hundred acres of timberland with a square frame house and log barn. There were some five acres cleared so that we could raise things to eat. We moved by wagon as there was no railroad in that direction from Kalamazoo. We took the plank road to Grand Rapids where father put most of our goods on a boat and had them shipped to Eastmanville. We started for Eastmanville after seeing to the shipping of the goods. We had Julia who was just a little thing. I was not much bigger since I was a slender child. I had a bad earache. We crossed the Bridge Street bridge to the west side of Grand Rapids, which was then just a frog pond. There was a tavern on Stocking Street and since it was noon we stopped there for dinner. The inn was run by an old Irishman who smoked a clay pipe. He asked mother what ailed that "damn kid." That made me cry and so she told him that I had an earache. He then put the stem of his pipe in my ear and blew smoke into it. It stopped the aching but made me so sick that mother was distracted.

After we had dinner at the tavern we continued on our journey. The road was muddy and full of ruts so that traveling was slow. That evening we reached a farmhouse on the corner where now stands the Gladel School House, just west of Sand Creek. Here we obtained lodging for the night. Our hosts were very hospitable people and gave the best they had. A cousin of mine, George Savage, and I slept with their young son. He had the "Michigan Itch" and safe to say we both got it.[3] Later, when we went to school the kids called us "Itchy Devils" and we felt and looked the part. The local doctor did not seem to know what to do. We were nearly frantic so mother took the three of us, George, Julia and me to a Kalamazoo physician. Mother said, "Doctor, I wish you would tell me what ails my children." He laughed and said, "My dear woman, it is just the old "Michigan Itch!" He gave her some sulphur and told her to mix some with syrup and lard and to oil us all over. Also, we were to have a warm bath before we went to bed. After three to four days, he said, it would be all gone. It proved true and we felt like new children.

To continue our trip, when we got to Lamont, they told us that the bridge at Deer Creek had gone out. The water was high and we had to drive a mile north on the townline road to Morris' Mill. Father, with the help of half of the mill men, took the wagon apart and carried it across the river and then led the horses over. What a trip! Three little children, a tired and homesick mother and a disgusted father. Mother sat down and cried when we arrived at the farm. To make matters worse, when we three children saw mother cry, we also began to cry. I suppose father was quite dis-

3. Probably scabies (Sarcoptes scabiei).

couraged. We had a small stove, some bedding, and a few things to eat. Father soon set up the stove and mother prepared some food. Mother, however, continued to cry. This upset father and he said, "Carrie, I will ship the goods back and we will return to New York." She replied, "Not much, George Wells! We will not show the white feather, not now!" Our household goods came on the boat the next day. The house had to be thoroughly cleaned for us and so did the log barn for the horses. My parents went to work with a will and when we were settled everything looked better. It was soon noised around that there were new neighbors and people called to extend a hand of welcome and of help.

Eastmanville was a busy place in those days. There was one general store, a shoe store, a print shop, a hotel and tavern, a grist mill and a saw mill, a blacksmith and wagon shop combined, a school and several residences. Such as they were, they completed the town. Soon a shipyard and a planing mill were erected. The first built three-masted sailing ships and the latter turned out brooms, mop handles and butter bowls.

Our income for a while was from four-foot log-wood that was shipped to Chicago and Milwaukee. We also sold shingles, staves and headings for barrels. We made the shingles from pine blocks 18 inches long. Father would first halve a block and then quarter it. I held a froe on the quarters while father hit it with a maul made from the knot of a tree. The strips were shaved into shingles in the barn on rainy days and during "leisure time." There were also men who came around to shave shingles. They were paid by the thousand. Our barn was covered with shingles that withstood the weather for 60 years or more. When we tore it down most of the shingles were still perfectly sound.

Staves and headings were made of white oak for whiskey and flour barrels. When a real small boy, I used to help father cut the staves and headings. Of course, I did not help much. I stood on a box to steady the saw. We used the wolf-fang saw which has no rakes and was therefore slow cutting. Father pulled and pushed it and I kept it from whipping. It was a hard way to make a living and to pay for land, but we did it.

Our meat was mostly wild game. We hunted bear, deer, squirrel, pigeons, and 'coon. The river was full of fish. I caught sturgeon that weighed up to 100 pounds and catfish that weighed 40. We dressed, smoked and made these fish into "halibut." I have seen flocks of passenger pigeons so dense that when going south for the winter they would darken the sun for hours. The squirrels were so thick they would eat up a cornfield in a short time. After we built rail fences, our dog, Brin, would drive them out of the fields onto the fence and I would kill them with a three-foot hickory stick. It did not take me long to get a good mess of squirrels.

Julia and I once caught a 200-pound deer when it was injured on the picket fence in our front yard. We caught his hind legs and held onto them until father killed him.

The wild turkeys were as numerous as other game and I have often seen as many as 50 or more in a flock. They were very shy. One day mother said to me, "Ros, I wish you would get a turkey for Sunday dinner." An old log shanty, where some squatters or trappers had lived, was near

us in a small plot of ground cleared of trees. I had seen turkey tracks there and had raked a place clear and scattered corn so they would come there to feed. The shanty had been boarded up but I knocked out some boards so that I could go inside. I settled myself in it early in the morning before the birds came out of the woods. To call them, I used a turkey caller an Indian had given me in return for some corn seed. It was not long before they began to answer. Soon a large flock, led by an old gobbler, came close. I kept still and had both barrels cocked and ready on the seeded spot. When they were all busy eating, I made a little whistle and up went every head. Letting both barrels go, I got two big fellows, all I could carry home. Turkeys weighed from 25 to 30 pounds. It was certainly fun to go hunting and fishing.

There were professional hunters who sought the fur of animals. I used to trap some and made a lot of pocket money. Muskrats were particularly plentiful. I would get fifty cents for a muskrat pelt, $1.50 for a deer skin, $5.00 for a bear, $2.00 for mink and seventy-five cents apiece for 'coon skins.

When we first moved on the farm at Eastmanville, the Ottawa Indians were encamped on the Grand River from Bass River to Spring Lake.

One rainy day father and I were working in the horse barn. The barn doors opened on the road. It was pouring real hard when someone drove up into the shelter of the barn. Father told me to open the doors and to tell them to drive in. When I did, I saw that they were a white man and an Indian. The white man introduced himself as Rocky Mountain Bill, an Indian Scout from the West. Father told him to put his horses in the stable and to feed them hay and grain. He also asked if they would have dinner with us. He said they would be glad to and father sent me in to tell mother that Rocky Mountain Bill and an Indian would be with us for dinner. When we went to eat, Bill turned to father and said, "I did not know you lived with a squaw." Mother was touched on the wrong side by that remark and said, "I will give you to understand, I am not a squaw." He laughed because he saw he had offended her and said that he did not mean it. "Well," he said, "I see you have the liver complaint in the worst form." Father agreed and said he had paid out a lot of money for relief and that nothing seemed to help her. She was as yellow as saffron. After dinner Bill told father that for $5 he would give him a prescription that he guaranteed as a sure cure in three months. He said that he would go with father to dig the roots and gather the barks to make the medicine. He said he was an Indian medicine-man. By now the rain had stopped, so they went along the river bank and found everything needed. They gathered wahoo, yellow parilla, sarsaparilla, sassafras, black cherry bark, dandelion, slippery elm and wintergreen. When he returned he asked mother for a kettle. After he washed and steeped the medicines, he strained the liquid and added some white sugar. He told father to put some alcohol in it to keep it from souring. In all, he made over a gallon. Mother was told to take a tablespoon twice a day, but that if it worked too hard to cut it to a teaspoon after a week. She did have to cut to the smaller amount. He said that it would make her feel badly for awhile but to keep taking it regularly. He told her that he was coming by in six months and if

at that time she was not a much different woman, "I will give you back the $5 and $5 more with it." She was completely cured before the time elapsed. He came back later and stayed three or four days with us. He told us that his parents, his two brothers, a sister and he were with a party of wagon migrants going West, when they were attacked one night by Indians. All were killed except his sister and himself. After the Indians got over their war dance, they found them hidden in some bushes and adopted them into the tribe. He and his sister became separated and he never saw her again. After a few years he escaped and became a close companion of Kit Carson. They both hated Indians, he said. He told us that he took a solemn oath to avenge the death of his family and had set the number of Indians to die at his hands at 100. He had 10 more to kill and would then kill no more, if they did not molest him. His body was covered with scars from tomahawks and scalping knives.[4]

There was an Ottawa Indian camp three miles down the river from us. The squaws made baskets and sold or traded them for food. Mother had never seen Indians before coming to Michigan. In New York State her family had read of the terrible Indian massacres of whites in the West and so she was deathly afraid of Indians. Whenever she saw one of them coming she and the children would run and hide. One day two squaws came while Julie and I were playing on the porch. They startled us some! The young squaw said, "Boo-shoo," which meant "Good day" in their language. She could speak English well. The other Indian woman had a papoose in a sack on her back. The younger one carried a large bundle of baskets and she asked if mother, or "white-squaw," would like some baskets. When I called mother, the squaw saw that she was afraid of them and she said, "Me no hurt white-squaw." Mother wanted two, a corn and a clothes basket. She told the Indian woman that she did not have any money. "You got speck?" That was pork. By this time father had raised some hogs so that mother could get a slab of bacon for her. The squaw threw up her hands and said, "Too much speck!" Pork was only two or three cents a pound at that time. Mother gave it to her and asked if she made sewing baskets. She said yes, showing her one in many colors. Mother asked her how much. "Nothing, too much speck," was her answer.

Once I ate dinner with an Indian named Frank Johnson, just to get him to cut broom bolts for me. I had rented the turning lathes in the planing mill and had bought a piece of wooded tax-title land on the Bass River. He used to call me "Ring" because at that time I wore celluloid collars. He asked me to eat dinner with him and his family. I thought that if it did not kill them, it would not kill me. We had muskrat soup and rye bread. We all sat on a skin around a big kettle and each had a bowl and a wooden spoon. Everything was clean, but at the thought of muskrat it kind of went against me. Frank and his squaw were so pleased to have a white man eat with them that I really enjoyed the dinner. It tasted fine. I furnished work for all the Indians who camped nearby that winter and made five hundred dollars out of the deal.

When I was a small boy, Grandfather Coleman traded his Kalamazoo property for a farm twelve miles north and west of Kalamazoo. It was about halfway between Otsego and Kalamazoo at a place called Alamo. I

4. One cannot help but wonder if Rocky Mountain Bill was a spinner of yarns. Editors.

was a puny kid and it was a long way to school from where we lived in Eastmanville. Grandmother took me out there where I had to walk only about two blocks to the schoolhouse.

Life at my grandparents' was very exciting for a young boy. Grandfather was quite a sportsman. Passenger pigeons were so thick that he used a big net, twenty feet long by twelve feet wide, to catch them. The net was set on a slant with two props. A cord was attached to each pole. So, Grandfather and I concealed ourselves in a bough house and waited until the ground was covered with pigeons. We then pulled the props and the net would be full. To attract the birds he used a stool pigeon on a piece of board, as a "teaser." When a string was pulled, the stool pigeon stood up and when the cord slackened, the bird went down, fluttering its wings. The pigeons in the trees would fly down to feed when they saw the decoy in action. I have seen grandfather take a wagon box full of birds to sell in the city.

At the back of the farm was a swamp several miles long and very wide which was a great place for wild game. An uncle of mine killed seven wolves there in one week. A part of the swamp was quicksand and very treacherous. Grandfather had a cow that ventured into it and when we found her, only her head and horns were to be seen. In an hour she was gone.

Everything we did on the farm was hard work. At Eastmanville we cut our hay with a scythe and gathered it up with a hand rake. We cut our grain with a cradle, bound it in sheaves, making the bands with a handful of straw.

Four a.m. hardly ever caught my father in bed. I was taught to rise early, for he would come to the stair door and call, "Roswell!" Some mornings the bed felt better than milking cows or feeding stock but when he called, "Roswell Henry!", I got right out of bed. Mother had breakfast ready at six and we were back at work by seven and worked twelve hours a day.

We farmed from 200 to 300 acres of land and always had a fine garden. My job was to weed the onions, carrots and beets and to hoe corn and potatoes. I also put water on the wood ashes to make lye for soap; put corn cobs and hickory bark on the fire to smoke the hams; fed the calves; split the wood; filled the wood box; cleaned the stables; ran errands; fed the chickens; hunted for eggs; brought water from the well and carried the nine o'clock lunch to the harvest hands. We used lots of turnips and I had to cut the tops off those as well as to pick up apples and do a thousand other things. As soon as I was big and sturdy enough, I carried bundles of grain for setting in shocks and helped mow hay. If I found time, I also ran candles in the candle molds. After these things were all done, I could play.

In the early days we put a bell on the bell cow and turned the herd loose to graze. It was my job to hunt them in the evening for milking. Because of the woods all about, the cows followed the lumber roads for miles. Once when I was ten or twelve years old they wandered a long way. When I found them it was getting dark and I was so bewildered that I lost my bearings and began to cry. However, I knew that the bell cow would know the way home. I led her to a fallen tree, got on her back and headed her home, or somewhere. She started down a road and the rest followed. Soon I heard a gun crack and I knew that it was father, for he had said that if I got lost he would fire a gun for me. Before long I was home, but so bewildered that

nothing looked natural. I couldn't even tell I had lived there. Even mother did not look natural.

When I was about twelve, father owned 40 acres adjoining the east side of our farm. Of this 40 acres there were about three acres of cleared land where a squatter had lived and which had grown up to grass and blackberries. The cows often went there to graze. There was a big gully on the south side of the clearing and a path around the head of it. One day during this time father and mother went to Grand Rapids to trade. Esther Garrison had come to stay with us children. When she told me that it was time to get the cows I took Brin, the dog, and started out. I could hear the bell and I followed the path to the clearing. Instead of Brin going with me around the head, he went directly across the gully. Just as I got to where the cows were, I heard a scream. It was terrible! It scared me and the cows. The dog had run on to a panther that was lying on a partly fallen tree at the bottom of the gully. When he saw Brin he let out that bloodcurdling yell, starting the cows for home on the dead run. I was so scared that the bell cow could not outrun me. We had a half mile to go, running at top speed all the way. As I went into the house Esther said, "Rosy, what makes you look so white and scared?"

Up to this time I had been in the woods so much that I had lost all fear and felt safe when Brin was with me because he was a big and powerful dog. He once caught a 200-pound deer by the throat and held it until father crossed the river to shoot it. I was not the only one scared that day. Three men hewing ship timber nearby took to their heels and ran out of the woods. Some hunters later went to the gully with dogs and they found panther tracks. They tracked it to north of Coopersville where it was cornered by the dogs and shot by the hunters. No one had ever heard of a panther in this region.

Occasionally my father took wool to the carding mill. There it was made into rolls about three feet long and as large around as your middle finger. Mother had a spinning wheel and she would spin these rolls into yarn at night. I used to carry the rolls to her to help her. The yarn she made was taken to a mill and woven into cloth. All our underclothes, sheets, everyday pants and school clothes were made of it. Mother dyed the cloth to make it nice.

Sometime after I was twelve years old mother bought material to make me a suit of "store clothes," as they called them then. She said to me, "Rosy, if you will go to Mrs. Gue's and borrow Dell's suit pattern, I will make you a nice suit of clothes for Sunday School."[5] Of course, I was on my toes and on my way. It was about three miles to Mrs. Gue's. When I came to the first turn, there was a big black bear sitting on a fallen tree close to the road. I had heard that bears would not molest you if you did not attack them, so I stood there wondering what to do. As I did not want to give in, I went around the bear through the woods. Beyond the turn there lived an old trapper and hunter named Charles Hudson. He lived alone and had two powerful dogs. I told him there was a bear sitting on a log at the turn. He grabbed his rifle and called his dogs. The bear was

5. This may be the Mrs. Mitchell (Lydia A.) Gue who is buried in the cemetery in Eastmanville and who died on July 1, 1868.

still there when we returned. The dogs tackled him right away and soon Hudson's rifle cracked and that was the end. Hudson later brought us a hind-quarter for our share. When I got to Mrs. Gue's, she would not let me go home alone so one of her boys took his gun and returned with me. It was an exciting trip.

At fourteen I earned forty dollars picking blackberries. Buyers came from Chicago and Milwaukee, driving from Grand Haven with horses and wagons. They returned to Grand Haven to catch a night boat home. Most pickers went back into the woods. However, one day when we went picking, I went just a little way in from the road where I ran into one of the finest patches. I soon filled my pail and I wondered why no one else picked there. I soon found the reason why. A yellow jackets' nest as big around as a bushel basket and three feet long was in the patch. After dark father went with me and set bundles of straw afire near the nest. He then hit the nest with a long pole. The hornets came out and flew right into the fire. Most of them were burned. Father then set the nest afire and after that I had free sailing. I took Aunt Sarah into my confidence and we reaped a harvest.

One year my Uncle Henry Wells came to visit us from Boulder, Colorado, where he owned a quartz mill. He gave me a ten-dollar gold piece because I was named for him and Uncle Roswell. With the money father bought five ewes for me. In the spring they had eight lambs and pretty soon I began to put them out on shares for half their wool and half their increase. In a short time I had a lot of sheep. As fast as I sold them, I put the money in a Grand Rapids' bank. I loaned money to my friends when they needed it. Most of them paid it back, but I had to knock it out of one fellow.

I used to earn a lot of money with our yoke of oxen towing logs that had been stranded by high water to the river. I earned as high as $200 in a season. When about seventeen father gave me a pair of male calves. A man who made ox yokes fashioned me a pair of little ones. Soon I had my calves so that I could get them to let me yoke them up and it was not long before I had them broken. They quickly knew their names, Tom and Jerry. When they were three years old I could get in the furrow behind father while he plowed with the horses. He could only make two rounds more than I because my oxen were fast walkers. When they were five years old I sold them to a Mister Lull for $200 for working in the woods. Father always gave me a fair share of the money I made. I never let the chance to earn money slip by.

When I was eighteen years old father's mother, Grandmother Wells, was taken sick. He had received a letter from friends in New York saying to come as soon as he could if he wanted to see his mother alive.[6] He felt very sad because he had not seen her for such a long time. He told mother that they could afford to go, but that he did not see how he could leave everything. I knew the farm from A to Z and we had a hired man who knew the ropes. Also, Aunt Sarah Coleman was working for us. I told dad and mother to get ready and go and that I would run the farm. Father said,

6. The Wells' left for Penn Yan, New York, on September 10, 1870 and remained there until his mother died on September 20 of that year.

"Boy, you can't do it. You're too young. There is too much work. Thirty-five acres of wheat to sow; twenty acres of corn to cut; five acres of potatoes to dig; twelve head of cows to milk; two span of horses to care for besides feed and harness, as well as all of the other chores we need to do." Nevertheless, father finally made up his mind to go and said to mother, "Get your clothes ready." Father and mother went to Grand Rapids and bought outfits for the twins, George and John, who were just babies and who went along with them.

Before leaving father told me to pasture the horses in a nearby clover field because he thought it too far to the regular pasture. Clover seed was then selling for about $20 a bushel. I told Dorson, our hired man, that clover seed was worth too much to pasture horses in it. We cut eight acres of it for father on the day that he got home. We thrashed it in the huller and got twenty-one bushels of seed which father took to Grand Rapids and sold for $400. Soon after he came home he called Dorson and me into the sitting room and gave $25 to him and $100 to me. The clover seed paid for their trip east and added much to my bank account.

About this time, I told father that I was going to buy me a "girl catcher," a horse and buggy, because I was going with a young lady, Miss Eva L. Griffith. We were schoolmates and had grown up in each other's company. Her father owned grist mills and turning lathes. I had money in the bank and I told father that I was going to Grand Rapids to buy me a nice rig. "You will want a nice horse," he said, and gave me a Cleveland Bay. I only wanted to put $250 in a carriage and harness and did not plan to spend more. In Grand Rapids I went to the Arthur Woods carriage factory and shop on Commerce Street. I was well acquainted with him because he came hunting on our farm each fall. He was very hard of hearing. When I went into his office he said, "My boy, what can I do for you?" I told him that I came to buy a big carriage. He took me into the show room and said, "I am going to show you the finest phaeton that ever came into Grand Rapids." He ran one on the floor and it was a fine one. When I asked him how much for it, he said $250. I shrugged my shoulders and said that I did not want to put quite that much money into a buggy because I also had to buy a harness. "How do you want to pay for it?" he said. I told him spot cash. He then said that I could have it for $225 and still have $25 to buy a silver-mounted harness. I had it all shipped by boat to Eastmanville the next day.

I was enthralled when it came because there were not many people then who had carriages in Eastmanville. When I heard the boat whistle for the landing, I took Dick, my horse, and went uptown. Mr. Thomas Hefferan was in the lumber business and had an office in town. He came out just as I went by his office. He said, "Ros, you have a fine horse there." I said, "Yes, father just gave it to me." "Well," he said, "I am going to have some fine buggies in soon. Come up and I will sell you one." We walked along the wharf where the boat docked. As she neared the landing, Mr. Hefferan said, "There is a mighty nice carriage on the bow of the boat." All I said was, "Yes," and did not tell him it was mine. As soon as the boat was moored, they ran out the gang plank and down came the carriage. "Why, it is coming here," he said while we walked to it. He looked at the shipping tag and he turned to me with a look of surprise

saying, "Why, Ros, is this yours?" "I guess it is," was my answer. It soon became the talk of the town and the envy of all the boys and girls.

I purposely did not tell Miss Griffith of my purchase in order to surprise her. On the following Sunday afternoon I drove to her home. The Griffith family was sitting in the front yard. When they saw me coming they all wondered who that could be with such a nice rig. As I tied my horse, I said, "Eva, come here. I want to show you something. What do you think of this?" "Whose rig is it?", she asked. I said, "It is all mine." She said, "Ros, you don't mean to tell me it is yours!" And I said, "Yep, would you like to christen it with the first ride in it?" She was as proud of it as I was.

I always liked to study. So much so, that the doctor told my mother I must stay out of school a year and not be allowed to study at night. At fifteen I was in the first, or highest, grade in school. My twentieth year (1873) was my last one in school. The county school superintendent, A. W. Taylor, came the last day of the term to give us our examination.[7] At the close of the session he called me to the desk and told me that I had passed 100 per cent. He handed me a third grade certificate which entitled me to teach that fall. I also received a notice from him to attend a teachers' convention to be held in Grand Haven. Over one hundred teachers were there. As a part of the program, a prize of a twelve-dollar dictionary was offered for the best penmanship. Mr. Taylor gave me a printed form to copy. I took it to my hotel room and spent the evening on it. Imagine my feelings when it was announced that the prize was awarded to the youngest teacher there. And the ovation I got! Guess I grew three inches taller by the time I got back home!

Mr. Taylor wanted me to take a school four miles north of Coopersville. It did not have a good reputation so I hesitated, being only twenty. Boys and girls as old or older than I were enrolled. Finally, I took it when Mr. Taylor said he thought that I could get things straightened out. No school had been held there for three years, that is no full terms. A gang of roughnecks broke them up. I had lots of muscle and was not afraid to fight if the occasion required it. The only trouble I had was with fellows who had not come to school all that winter. The little brother of one of them wrote me a note saying they were coming that day to clean up my school. There were four or five boys in my class who were as big and as old as I was. When I showed them the note they gave it back to me saying, "We will back you." The two came, sat with some girls, began to laugh and talk out loud. The line of battle was soon drawn. I was right on my toes and my indignation was at its height when I walked to my desk to take off my coat and to lay it and my watch on the desk. By that time everyone was on the alert. I told my scholars to keep their seats. The news of the note had spread through the school and every child, big and little, had on his war paint as did their teacher. I walked to the outside door, opened it, then walked back to the first fellow saying, "Do you see the hole the carpenter made? Now get out through it or I'll knock you out." One of the boys, Henry Kettle, said, "Hit him. We will back you." The ruffian took his hat and

7. He was county superintendent from 1867 to 1869 and principal of Spring Lake School in 1870. If Wells' date is correct, then Taylor may have been conducting the examination as a member of the County Board of Education to which he belonged as late as 1882.

just walked out. I told the next one to follow the first. He went, saying as he turned, "We'll meet you later."

This happened on a Friday and on my way home that night I had to pass by their houses. Henry Kettle and Dan Deacon said they were going with me to Coopersville to see that there was fair play. We did not see them until near where a bridge crossed the creek. They sat on the railing waiting for me. When I got close to them, I took off my coat and handed it to one of my boys. "Now, one at a time and I'll put you over that railing into the creek." Well, the fight seemed to have left them. The fellow that had threatened me walked up, put out his hand saying, "Let's call the whole thing off. Let's go uptown and we will buy the drinks." That ended all the trouble.

I took the school for three months, receiving $50 a month and board. Before the three months were up the board had money for another, so I taught for four months. I started with forty pupils, but my success was such that I soon had eighty. One of the school board members said that I had so many students that I could not teach them all at one time. So I gave twenty evenings of night school and even had parents coming. It was surprising to find grown men who could not figure simple interest. We gave a dramatic entertainment at the close of the night school session. Just before the program ended, Mr. Ozia Nebles, a member of the board and a pupil, got up and said that he had a word to say. "Friends," he said, "Mr. Wells has given us twenty evenings of school on his own time. I was one who attended. I feel we owe him compensation for his unselfish and splendid work with us." He took off his hat, put $5.00 in it and said, "I put in five dollars, all do your duty." They presented me with over $50. I felt very well paid in that the newspaper had a fine editorial praising me for my work. The school had a first class name after that. Also, I gained a host of lifelong friends. After that I taught twelve successful terms including some in my home school. I ruled my schools by moral persuasion and never struck a child.

When I closed my first school I had $250 as I had not spent a cent of my pay. We had had a very dry season that year and almost everything failed. At this time we had thirty head of cattle, nine head of horses and 125 sheep. The day I came home I saw that father was downcast, not as jovial and full of jokes as usual. While eating supper I said to him, "Dad, why are you so down? It isn't like you." He said, "We have only about six stacks of hay left with all this stock and no money to buy more with." He said that if he had some ready cash, he knew where he could buy two stacks of hay for $100. "But I don't have it," he said. Two stacks of hay would be enough to carry us through the spring. I took $200 out of my pocket book, gave it to him and said, "This will carry you through. You can pay me when you can."

I helped father on the farm and taught school winters until I married Eva L. Griffith in 1876. I then became a salesman for the McCormick Binder Company, later called International Harvester Company. When I left that firm [1881] I formed a partnership with my brother-in-law, John A. Wagner, who was married to my oldest sister, Julia. We engaged in the grocery, hardware, farm implement, and the wagon and buggy trade.

We also handled wood and farm produce, had a meat market and a meat wagon, later two, on the road. The firm was known as "Wagner and Wells." We were in business together for seven years. We made money and had a fine trade. I traded farm tools for fat cattle which we then killed for our meat market. We owned six acres where we had our slaughterhouse. Everyday I was on the job at 4:00 a.m. to see that the wagons were filled and off on their trip. Sometimes it would be 8:00 a.m. before we got home for breakfast. My wife used to make wry faces, but she did not scold for she knew that it was our bread and butter.

After we dissolved our partnership, I bought the ship Doctor Hanley. Included in the deal was a thousand cords of wood and I leased a dock and yard at the old boat landing in Grand Rapids. The ship was a freighter and carried 125 cords of sixteen-inch wood. The Hanley carried a seven man crew, including a captain, pilot, fireman, cook and engineer. I sometimes made the trip because I bought and measured wood. When business was slack, I put canvas over all the seats and organized excursions. After the wood gave out on the river, there was not enough business for so many boats and I sold the Hanley to a firm on Saginaw Bay. I next bought wood in car lots and shipped it to Michigan from another state. About this time I bought a gravel pit and sold screened sand, gravel, stone and brick. I also excavated basements, built sidewalks and driveways, and graded lots in Grand Rapids. The excavation for Universalist All Souls Church, the Botsford Block on Division Street, the Luce Furniture Factory, as well as a large number of smaller jobs, were done by my company. For $1,000 I took a contract from a Mr. Tufft to fill in on the corner of Pleasant and Madison Avenues. I had lots of dirt to haul. To get some, I put up a sign, "Free Drinks for Clean Dirt Only." It was not long before I had it filled and had a check for $1,000. I always had all I could do until the panic struck us under Cleveland's second administration, 1893-1897, when we had regular hard times. You could not get a job for love or money. The Builders' and Traders' Exchange, to which I belonged, closed and builders moved their desks into their own homes to save rent. Everything shut down. I was left with six teams and with nothing to do so I sold three to a lumberman, traded two for a lot, and sent one down on the farm. My brother John was in the same fix. After we got rid of our teams, we took a job from Silas Part cutting wood near Byron Center. We got only forty cents a cord, but it kept the wolf our of our yard. He and I cut, split and piled six cords every day. There were sugar shanties in the woods and I conceived the idea of hiring men to help us. I advertised for men, offering board and tobacco, if they wanted to cut wood. We had more men come than we wanted. Each had to cut six cords a day. Things were so cheap that I could buy a hind-quarter of beef at four cents a pound, potatoes at ten cents a bushel and twenty-five pounds of sugar for a dollar. We hired a cook for the men and came out way ahead. My brother and I rented rooms in farm houses, moved in some furniture and so did not feel the pinch of the panic. Later, I rented a 40 acre farm for $25 for the year and had all kinds of food. One of the neighbors let me rake his wheat stubble. Since I furnished the horse and rake, I got half. When we thrashed his wheat, I thrashed mine and received 40 bushels. I put it in the mill and drew flour as needed. The same neighbor gave me half of the milk and butter for caring for his cow. I also cut wood

on shares and soon had 25 cords of nice, seasoned black oak and maple. In the same way I exchanged work and got my corn planted. That year I raised 200 bushels of potatoes. Father's potatoes failed that year and I was able to give him 50 bushels. They were worth only 25 cents a bushel. In the fall I also had a lot of apples. I hired a neighbor and we took a load to Grand Rapids but could not sell them at the stores for more than 10 cents a bushel. We peddled all day but could not sell many because no one had money. I did manage to trade some for sugar and coffee, however, When we drove through the Polish neighborhood there were about 40 children following us. "Give us an apple, Mister," they cried. I told the driver to start up quickly and out rolled the apples. Every woman and child for blocks around ran up to gather the fruit. The women made bags of their dresses and filled them full. Boys filled their pockets and hats. To see those hungry people get them was worth more than money.

My family and I stayed in Byron Center for two years. When I worked for farmers I got a dollar and a half per day and my dinner. I had learned to feed a thrashing machine and in the fall I found time to go with one and earn $2.50 a day. As my wife did not want to stay home alone, I drove home nights. I did this for nearly two months. In the meantime, father was stricken with paralysis. The old farm was going back to seed. My brothers John and George had married and moved away. There was no one at home and my parents had to depend on hired help. Father had mother write and say, "Ros, won't you come home and save the farm?" When I saw him, he looked at me with those dear old pleading eyes, hanging on to my hand. That was too much for me. Lillian, my wife, said it was not right to leave them alone.[8] I agreed with her, sold out everything, and went back to take care of my father and mother. He lived helplessly for five years. My wife and I ran the farm for about fifteen years. I soon put it on a paying basis. I went to work: trimmed the apple orchard, built more fences, put a new roof on the house, turned the horse barn around and put its foundation in shape and broke up the old fields and reseeded them. Five of our girls were born while on the farm: Evelyn, Marian, Carolyn, Laura and Lillian.

In the fourth year we set out six acres of peaches. One year the peach orchard yielded nearly 2,000 bushels. It was a cold, backward year with a snow storm in May. Snow fell to the depth of eight inches. Though it snowed day and night, it was not cold enough to kill my buds. It seemed that every peach and apple bud except mine, from Grand Rapids to Grand Haven, was killed. I kept my fruit well sprayed and had the market in my hand. At this time I had two teams and I bought a big fruit wagon that could carry fifty bushels of peaches. I hauled my crop to Grand Haven where there was a good market for peaches at $2 to $2.50 a bushel. A commission house in Chicago took all my surplus stock if I got stuck with it in Grand Haven. I drew most of the peaches myself. I never saw a bed from Monday morning to Saturday night while the peaches were ripening. In the evening I would come in and drop down on the lounge and tell my wife not to awaken me until it was time to go. My teams were so used to

8. See genealogical record, pages 17, 18 and 19, for data about Wells' second marriage to Lillian M. Dickinson on October 12, 1892.

the trip that, when coming home, I could tie the lines around me and drop off to sleep. For an entire month I was on the road day and night. My trees were in rows up and down the hill and were Albertas, Early and Late Crawford, Early Michigan and other choice varieties. They were so beautiful and impressive that people came on Sundays to look at them. We got $1 a bushel for our seconds.

I will turn back the pages of time to when I was a boy and I will relate some things I have omitted. When I was about eight years old, an epidemic of diphtheria swept the country. One day during this time I came home from school and told mother that my throat was sore. Since there had been no cases near us, or in school, she was not alarmed. She bound a piece of fat pork with vinegar on my throat before I went to bed. The next morning my throat was worse and I had a high temperature by noon. My mother sent my cousin, George Savage, who lived with us, to Lamont for Dr. Botchford [Bottsford?] who was a lady doctor. She came and told mother I had black diphtheria. My poor mother was frightened because children were dying everywhere. Flora, my little sister, was also sick. Doctor Botchford said, "Your baby is worse off than Rosy." Nobody would come to a home where anyone was sick so that father and mother had to fight it out alone. The day of the crisis the doctor told my parents it would come about midnight and that she would stay. When it came I began to strangle. The doctor made a swab to clear my throat of strings of mucous. Some were a foot long. For two hours she sat by my bedside helping me to get my breath. Finally the doctor said that the crisis was over for both children. For years I had pits in my throat and I could not sing or talk plainly. I finally outgrew it so that I could talk and sing as well as ever.

In a few years another epidemic of the same disease came but I was immune. Because of this, doctors would send for me to stay with patients and, more especially, to nightwatch after they had died. There were no undertakers then, nor embalming. During the night I had to soak a cloth with a solution the doctor left for me to put on their faces to keep them from turning black. To sit in a room alone with a corpse and to change the cloth every hour was no pleasant task. At first I was upset, but soon it did not try my nerves. One day a doctor came to me and said he wanted me to watch a girl that had died. She was about eighteen and the daughter of a very poor people. She was laid out in the room where I had to sit. It was in the dead of winter, the snow was deep and the house was old and cold. I sat by the stove, but still was cold. The wind blew a gale, the mother moaned all night, and to make things more gloomy, a big owl would let out one of his doleful, "whoo-whoos" frequently. It is needless to say I was glad when morning came.

There were no hearses then. Father had sent to the East and bought a democrat wagon. It had a long box with three removable seats so that he was able to use it as a hearse. Many a person I have drawn to their last resting place! I acted as nurse, undertaker, driver of hearse and also sang at funeral services. I sometimes thought I belonged to the good Samaritans.

People say Michigan is a playhouse for people of leisure. Who made it so? My father, mother and the boys and girls of our time!

I can well remember the first kerosene lamp we had. One day father

and mother were in Grand Rapids and saw kerosene lamps on display. They bought one and a can of oil. When they came home, we children were sitting around the table, all asleep. The tallow candle had nearly burned out. It was late, but father said, "We are going to see this thing burn, to see if it will give a better light than a candle." When he went to fill the lamp. mother said, "Get way back, it might explode." We did. Our eyes were as big as dollars when father lighted it. What a radiant glow! Then everyone around Eastmanville bought one.

We will go back to 1861 when Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States. I can well remember the echo of the first shot that was hurled at Fort Sumter by the Rebels soon after his inauguration. When Lincoln called to arms, the whole north was ablaze with excitement. Everywhere there was the sound of the fife and drum and all the boys were eager to enlist. My uncles, David and Dell, enlisted in Company I, Second Michigan Infantry.[9] Uncle Dell Coleman was only nineteen years old while I was eight or nine at that time. I was at grandfather's when he enlisted. Grandfather sent Dell to town with a load of produce. Before Dell went, Grandmother made him promise that he would not enlist. Between his friends and the recruiting officer he was persuaded to join. Dell told the officer that he had to go home as he had a team of horses in the livery barn. When he did not come home by 9:00 p.m. Grandmother walked the floor crying. Grandfather said, "Polly, he probably enlisted." It was midnight before he got home. When he did come in, and said he had enlisted, Grandmother fainted. They worked over her all night and as fast as she came out of one faint, she would collapse in another.

Dell went to camp the same night. And what a night! Neighbors came in, mothers cried and fathers paced the floor! I was up all night and cried myself sick.

Uncle Dell was a sharpshooter. His duty was to pick off the enemy officers. Uncle David and he messed together. They were in the thick of a battle when David said, "Dell, pick off that officer on that white horse." As Dell's gun cracked, a minnie ball struck his left hand and cut three fingers off. The doctors wanted to amputate the rest, but he said, "No, save my thumb and finger if you can." They did and he could do a lot of work the rest of his life. My father had lost his trigger finger in an accident with a log chain so they would not take him. But he joined a Lincoln Club to help mothers and children of soldiers.

I wish you could have seen the loyalty of the boys of my age. About 25 of us bought little wooden guns while one boy had a drum. The Lincoln Club gave us a flag. We would parade behind our commander. We even had a torchlight parade. Later we had a boy's fife and drum corps. Father was the organizer of it. That same old fighting spirit lingers with me today.

9. David Coleman enrolled at Detroit, Michigan, on April 24, 1861 and reenlisted at Blaines Cross Roads, Tennessee in 1863. He was mustered out on July 28, 1865. Francis Adelmo Coleman [Dell] enlisted at Kalamazoo, Michigan, on February 21, 1865. He was wounded before Petersburg, Virginia, April 2, 1865 and was discharged on June 15, 1865.

I almost forgot to mention that in my young manhood, before I was married, I belonged to the village brass band consisting of 21 pieces. I played the tuba. Mr. York of the York Band Instrument Factory, in Grand Rapids, gave us instructions at $10 a lesson. We played for excursions, political gatherings, and in fact, when and where we could make $25. On one Fourth of July we won the first prize given by the City of Grand Haven. We also got $25 from the captain of one of the lake boats when we played on an excursion to Muskegon. On our return to Grand Haven, the city gave us $15 to play in the [illegible] Sports. We were also given our dinner at the Cutler Hotel with our girls who went with us free. We had chartered the L. Jenison for a joint Lamont and Eastmanville Sunday School excursion. We did not get back home until one o'clock. The river was full of logs and we had to run slowly. We had a nice day of sports, with fifty shells in the rowing matches. Some had as many as ten oarsmen. The yacht race on Spring Lake was a fine sight. Some of the girls got seasick on the Lake Michigan ride. Carrie Gleadel fell in the lake.[10]

When my father was still running the old farm, just after the Civil War, everything commenced to boom. At this time we had many bushels of wheat on hand. It was worth only fifty cents a bushel. Father was not pinched for money to run things and he said, "Ros, let's build a big granary and put our wheat in it." By then the price had gone to $1.00 a bushel. In the meantime, someone got a corner on wheat in the Board of Trade in Chicago. Wheat shot up five to ten cents a bushel a day until it went to $2.00. One day, one of the big millers from Grand Rapids drove in our yard and asked if Mr. Wells was at home. "Mr. Wells," he said, "I hear you have about 2,000 bushels of wheat. I want to buy it." Father sold the wheat right then and there. It was some work to draw and sack all that wheat.

Father helped build the Methodist Episcopal Church in Eastmanville. When we first went there, we had church in the schoolhouse with circuit rider preachers. There were some good singers in church who formed the choir. The choir leader got the key with a tuning fork. He put it into his mouth between his teeth and then drew it back and forth until his ear would get the chord. He would sing "do" or "re" and the rest would follow. When the congregation was singing some had the key and some not. It was like filing a saw. One time when the minister began to preach, he said, "Dear friends, by chance we came into this world and by chance we will go out of it." A girl thought that he said "By chunks we came into this world and by chunks we will go out of it." She let out a whoop, ran down the aisle and out the door. When the minister started talking again he said that she was a rude girl. I never knew what nationality he was but he was a funny looking man and you could not understand much he said.

I have tried in my weak way to give you a resumé of a part of my life. My wife and I tried to keep the cup of milk of human kindness filled to the brim. The latchstring always hung on the outside and our friends were always welcome. We had many anxious hours and saw years of self denial. We vanquished selfishness to a great extent from our lives. In fact, we tried to do unto others as we would that others should do unto us.

10. George Wells, the author's brother, later married Carrie Gleadel. September 5, 1894.

COLEMAN FAMILY

William Coleman m. (?); m. Bridget Row
b. 1619 d. 1680 — d. 1680

William m. Mary Mapes; m. Sarah Purrier
b. c1650 — b. 1662 — b. 1630
d. c1705 — d. 1707

William m. Mary (?) — John, George, Abigail, Sarah
b. 1680 — d. 1725
d. 1742

Daniel m. Esther Curtise 1729 — Joshua, Joab, Samuel, William, Nathaniel, Thomas, Jeremiah, Mary
d. 1790 — m. Elizabeth Smith

Caleb m. Desire (Kesiah) Clark
b. 1745 — b. 1752
d. 1824

James m. Elizabeth Brown
b. 1771 — b. 1775
d. 1848 — d. 1845

Elinor Alanson — Mahiteble — Julia Ann — David Brown m. Mary Ann Rugar 1827 — John — Eliza Ann m. Rodney Seymour 1834 — Fanny — James — Wm. — Henry Harrison

David Brown: b. 1803, d. 1888
Mary Ann Rugar: b. 1805, d. 1885
Eliza Ann: b. 1807, d. 1889
Rodney Seymour: d. 1881

Martha — Caroline m. George Wells 1851 — Moses — John — David — George — Francis [Dell] — Sarah

Caroline: b. 1831, d. 1925
George Wells: b. 1825, d. 1898

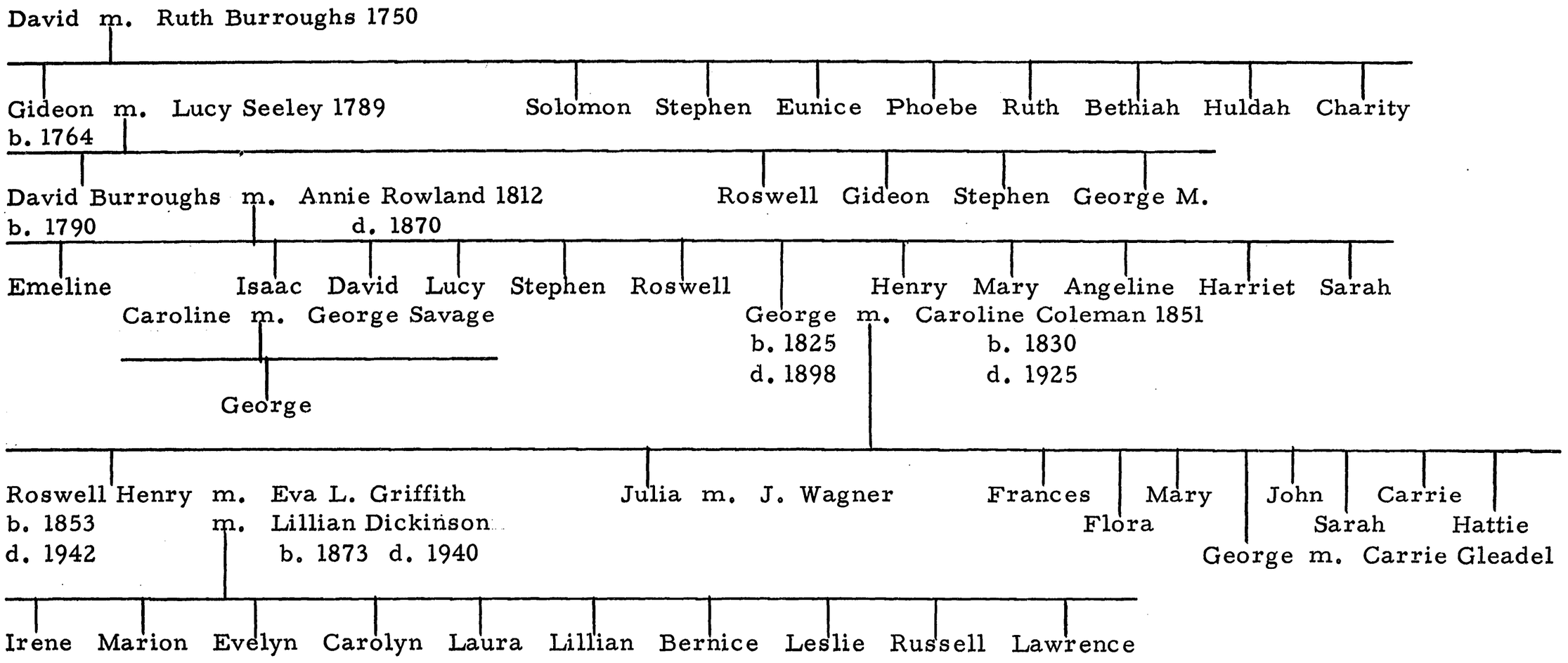
Roswell Henry [See Wells Genealogy for other Wells Children]

W E L L S F A M I L Y

Welles, perhaps Robert Welleys, m. (?)

- Thomas m. Elizabeth (?); m. Elizabeth Bryan
  - Ann
  - Robert m. Alice (?) d. c1619
    - Robert
    - Thomas m. Alice Tomes c1615
      - Ann
      - Robert
      - Thomas
      - Samuel
      - Joseph
      - Sarah
      - Mary
      - John m. Elizabeth Bourne 1647 b. 1621 d. 1659
        - Samuel m. Abigail Wheeler 1686 b. 1656 d. 1729
          - Samuel Welles, Jr. m. Mary Watkins b. 1686 d. 1751
            - David m. Ruth Burroughs 1750
            - Sarah
            - Four other daughters
            - Samuel
            - Jedidah
        - John
        - Thomas
        - Robert
        - Temperance
        - Sarah
        - Mary
- Walter
- William

Wells Family (continued)



Genealogical information supplied by Mrs. M. Eugene Malone.