



THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY STORY

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A HISTORY OF
DAWSONVILLE AND SENECA
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

by

Jane Chinn Sween

Editor's Note: Mrs. Sween has presented to our Society a definitive history of the Dawsonville-Seneca area. Dawsonville was the home of Mrs. Sween's grandfather, Dr. Upton Nourse, who practised medicine in the area for many years.

The typescript of more than 100 pages includes:

- (1) A detailed account of 56 farms, houses, etc. in the area, showing the succession of owners. These are keyed to a modern map.
- (2) Extensive genealogies of the Allnutt, Darby, Dawson, Nourse and Peter families.
- (3) Cemetery records.
- (4) Letters and newspaper notes referring to the area in the past.

We regret that we cannot include all this fine material in our Story. We have extracted some of the items of more general interest. Persons interested in all the valuable details we have had to omit are advised to make an appointment to consult the volume in the Society's Library.

A HISTORY OF DAWSONVILLE AND SENECA

Dawsonville is a small farming community. It has changed relatively little through the years. It reached the peak of commercial affluence at the end of the 19th Century. The name of the town is derived from the Dawson family. They were among the first settlers and exerted much influence in the community.

Politically the area lay in the Sugarland Hundred as it was called when Montgomery County was formed from Frederick County in 1776. About 1821, the County was divided into Districts and this section was called Medley District #3.

Through the countryside runs Great Seneca Creek and all its tributaries including Dry Seneca Creek. One of the outstanding characteristics of the area is the color of the soil. It derives its hue from the red sandstone in the ground. This stone is found in abundance along the Potomac River to the South and was quarried extensively here at one time. It is reflected in the early homes and barns which were frequently of this native stone. It can also be seen in the tombstones which stand out distinctively in a cemetery or burial plot.

DAWSONVILLE

One of the first settlers in the Dawsonville area was Thomas Dawson. He was born in 1708 at his father's plantation Saturdays Work on Broad Creek in Prince George's County. His parents were John and Mary (Doyne) Dawson. The story goes that John Dawson met this Irish girl on board the ship bringing them to this country and he married her then and there. Their son, Thomas, married Elizabeth Lowe, daughter of a neighboring planter named Nicholas (or John) Lowe, in 1740. They moved to Montgomery County (then still Prince George's County) shortly after their marriage. He built his home at Mothers Delight and later added other tracts.

Thomas Dawson and his wife had three sons: Benoni, Nicholas Lowe, and Robert Doyne. During their generation came the Revolutionary War. Robert wished to join the army but was turned down because he was too short. In consequence, this enterprising young man heightened the heels of his boots, reapplied and was accepted. He served in the Maryland Line under General John Eager Howard during the battles of Long Island and Cowpens. He was severely wounded at the battle of Germantown in Pennsylvania.

Thomas Dawson and all of his three sons subscribed to the Oath of Fidelity. Thomas died in 1800 near Dawsonville. Of his ten children, one, Benoni, went to Pennsylvania; his other descendants remained in the Dawsonville area.

Another family associated with Dawsonville is the Allnutt family. The first Allnutt in Maryland was William Allnutt, born 1670. William was a Quaker, living at Upper Cliffs, Calvert County. His son, James, in 1763 bought 746 acres of land in Montgomery County (then Frederick County). He and his family moved to this estate Thomas' Discovery. The land descended to his sons and they and James' various descendants intermarried with the Dawsons and other area families. A few moved to other parts of Montgomery County and to the West.

Other area families included the Darbys, Darnalls, Dysons, Veirs and others.

The first postoffice in Dawsonville opened in 1825 with Nicholas Dawson as Postmaster.

The following is a directory for the Dawsonville area in 1880:

Population of Medley District - 4,252
Population of Dawsonville - 75
Postmaster - Allnutt, Henry Clinton
Blacksmith - Stang, F. C.
Merchant - Allnutt, Henry Clinton
Physician - White, N. S.
Shoemaker - Crown, William
Farmers:

Allnutt, Benjamin
Benoni
James
Nathan W.
Byrd, John
Darby, Thomas
Dawson, Americus
Frederick A.
James M.
Randolph
Dyson, Benjamin
Joseph
Samuel
Jones, Thomas
Pyles, B. Frank
Thomas
Vinson, Napoleon

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SENECA

John Garrett laid out a town on the west side of Seneca Creek in 1787. He gave away the lots as prizes in a lottery held Oct. 15th of that year. The charge was 5 pounds sterling per ticket. The town was called Newport. However, the community was not the success he had envisioned and development was very slow.

It was the coming of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal that brought life to the area. Work on the Canal started in 1828. It was done by axe and stump puller, shovel and wheelbarrow, horse drawn plow and scraper. Many loads of stone from nearby quarries were delivered and expert stone masons began the construction of locks and lock-houses. Laborers were imported from England and Ireland, the usual wage being \$10 a month with \$20 for a skilled mason. Camps were set up in which the men lived.

In November, 1830, the first completed section of the Canal from Little Falls to Seneca was opened for navigation. The following summer water was admitted to the entire route from Rock Creek in Georgetown to Seneca. A controversy with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad over the right-of-way at Point of Rocks delayed the opening of the Canal west of Seneca until 1833.

The two decades following the War Between the States were the "hey-day" of the Canal. In 1871 over 850,000 tons were transported. This was the peak year. As coal began to be shipped by railroad, Canal traffic declined. The flood of 1889

found the Canal Company with insufficient capital to repair the damage done. The Company was forced into bankruptcy and in 1924 the Canal ceased to operate. The land is now owned by the Federal Government and is administered by the Department of the Interior.

In the reminiscences of Alice Darby Nourse, she tells of trips to Georgetown on the canal boats. "One thing we all looked forward to for weeks was a trip to Washington or Georgetown to buy new finery or to see our friends. There were two ways we could make the trip - drive all the way with a horse and buggy or go on the Packet which was a little boat which made the round trip from Georgetown to Point of Rocks each day on the Canal. It took several hours to go from Seneca to Georgetown if everything went along smoothly, but the schedule varied from trip to trip to the extent of several hours. This would prove quite annoying to the passengers at Seneca, impatiently pacing the Canal bank or waiting inside the old stone house at Seneca where Johnny Riley lived for so many years and which is still standing."

The Packet was divided into three compartments - a saloon in the middle, the Captain's room in front and the kitchen in the rear. Folding tables were set up at meal times in the saloon while the passengers were served; then they were removed to give more room. The Packet could accommodate about 50 passengers, though it was very seldom that as many as fifty took passage. The saloon had long seats around the sides which were upholstered in red plush and looked very fine.

Lock #24 was located at Seneca. It was called Riley's Lock because Johnny Riley was the lock tender. It was his job, day or night, to open the lock to change the water level for the passage of the canal barges. In addition to the house and garden plot with which he was furnished, he received a salary. As one might surmise, the Canal froze solidly during the winters and traffic ceased. The Rileys had a farm on the Seneca-Darnestown Road where they lived in the winter when Mr. Riley's duties were not demanding.

Also living at Seneca was the superintendent of the Canal from Violet's Lock to Brunswick. This was Samuel Sidney Connell. In 1915 he was still living with his wife Hattie (Violet) Connell in a house beside the "basin" - a wide place in the Canal a few yards west of the aqueduct over Seneca Creek. He held this position for 30 years, but lived in this Company House for 55 years. "Sid" Connell died in 1933 at the age of 75. The Company house was torn down after his death. The eight Connell children live in the Washington area, three of them at Seneca.

The local red sandstone was quarried in quantity around Seneca. One quarry was owned by the United States Government and located near the Connell home. Another was near Violet's Lock. There was also the Seneca Sandstone Company's quarry which began operations in 1850. Through the years it furnished building material for the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress, backing stones for the Washington Monument and for various homes in Georgetown. It has been said that it was used as far away as New York for the Museum of Natural History.

The Company utilized the facilities of the Canal for its own purposes. A separate gate was installed in the Canal west of Seneca Creek which diverted some of the water into the plant. There the crude, uncut boulders were brought out of the quarry over a narrow gauge railroad track in gondolas pulled by mules. Water from the mill race fed by the Canal ran the turbines which furnished the power for cutting.

About 1900 the quarries discontinued operation; the quality of stone became inferior. For many years after the quarry was abandoned the site was used for picnics. Back of the building was a race where men and boys went bathing. Across the heavy beams of the building one finds today the carved initials of many young folks.

There were no major engagements in this area during the Civil War. At one time J.E.B. Stuart and his troops crossed the River near Seneca at what they called Rowser's Ford. In her reminiscences, Alice Darby Nourse tells of one occasion when Confederate troops from the Virginia side of the River and Union troops from the Maryland side met unexpectedly in the road in front of her house. Several Confederates were killed and no one came to get their bodies, so her father buried them. Several weeks later the sister of one of the dead Confederates came and identified her brother by a ring he was wearing. It is said that the ring is now on display in a New Orleans Museum.

The top of the hill above Seneca was fortified and manned by Union troops. Typhoid fever broke out in the Camp. Ladies of the Community took appetizing food to the sick men. Marching armies often raided local bee hives and orchards. There were several burial plots where Civil War soldiers were buried in the area, but all traces of them have disappeared and only a few of the residents can remember their location.

In recent years the mouth of Seneca Creek has become a favorite place for fishermen and boatmen. A hotel was built and a great many camps and cottages line the shores of the Creek. On River Road nearby is Allnutt's store, sometimes the location of the postoffice when there was a Seneca Postoffice; today the address is Poolesville R.F.D. Electricity came to the area in 1934.

It is recorded that there has been a mill at Seneca since 1780. By 1865 it was owned by Upton Darby. Twice while he was the owner the mill burned to the ground. The first time it was rebuilt at once, but within 18 months it had burned again. He rebuilt it a second time, having sustained a loss of \$35,000.

In addition to the milling operation the company handled milling supplies, wheat, flour, feed, corn and fertilizers. They shipped grain, hay and straw. They even owned their own Canal boats for the purpose of getting their products to the markets of Georgetown. They had a warehouse about halfway down Seneca Creek. The products of the mill were transported from the mill to the warehouse by means of a small railway, the tracks of which were visible for many years after the Mill stopped using it. At the warehouse the goods, sometimes after storage, were transferred to open boats which could not go farther upstream as this was as far as the Creek was navigable. The boats carried the grain and flour down Seneca Creek into the River and down the River to the Guard Lock between Riley's Lock and Violet's Lock. Here the products were transferred to Canal Boats for the remainder of the trip. The mill ceased to function soon after 1918.

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NEWS OF THE Dawsonville Area

taken from Montgomery County papers (probably the Advocate)
(Not in chronological order, but in the order in which
they were found) Many have no dates. Signatures include:
Toney, Utetuty, Wild Bill, Johnny Reb, Degrada and
Ivanhoe. Dates 1873-1883

General News

The 29th of December was said to be the coldest day and night for many years - 16 degrees below zero.

I am glad to hear that Rockville is to have a town hall and I hope it will not be taken out in talk. Being the County Seat it is much in need of _____

Isaac Beckard went to visit his brother who boards with Alfred Scott and while there he gave Scott's children some fire crackers which they fired, causing much trouble with Scott's wife for which she said some words to Isaac whereupon he picked up an axe and struck her, knocking her down and bruising her very badly.

As Mr. George Brewer was coming home from Beallsville last week a horse belonging to Mr. Howard Griffith was drinking at the branch and as Mr. Brewer rode past the animal, it turned and kicked him just below the knee, causing a very painful wound.

When in Rockville I was somewhat surprised when asked the population of Dawsonville for I thought that everyone knew. Our town consists of two stores, one shoemaker, one blacksmith shop, several dwellings and when we get our railroad we hope to have a fine town hall and drug store. (Editor's note - there are several references to street addresses; Mrs. H. C. Allnutt of No. 27 Front St.; Mr. Arthur Williams has built a new store at corner of Front and White St.)

We expect to have a telephone from Dawsonville to Boyd's Station.

Hancock and English tickles the fancy of a large majority of our people and the excitement of clubs and pole raising is rife. Edwards Ferry will organize a club in a few days with Mr. Martin Fisher as their leader. Mr. Joseph Dyson has been invited to deliver an address at their pole raising. (Editor's note - Hancock and English were candidates for President and Vice-President in 1880. Mrs. Sween's history includes a "floater" advertising "The Hancock and English basket picnic at Dawsonville Grove on Sept. 23, 1880; dancing to commence at 9 o'clock A.M.". (Signed by about 50 committee members)

St. Peter's Church erected in 1848 (in Poolesville) has a new steeple. Its congregation will soon turn over a very handsome commodious parsonage to their pastor, the Rev. Mr. Thomas (Henry), a talented scholar whose general disposition and prepossessing manners have so endeared him to his congregation that they are doing everything in their power to add to his comfort and happiness.

News about Farming

(Editor's note: Daily activities connected with the daily job of farming did not constitute "news", so occupy little or no space in the Paper).

The voice of the sickle has been stilled until another year, and the wheat in the fields that but a few days ago was one unbroken sheet waving to and fro is now in the shocks and ere another week will be in large stacks, leaving the fields with a green velvet coating of clover. The corn fields look very sickly and hilly, caused by the farmers' "cuss" friend, the cutworm.

Wheat is turning out badly. The corn crop looks very sick but the recent rains, it is thought, will bring it up to the average as the late replanting is not much crowded by tall corn.

Mr. Aaron Hersberger shipped on Saturday to the Queenstown market, 32 of the finest cattle ever sent from this section.

The cattle excitement is still raging and the farmers are moving off large lots at a fair profit.

About 130 cattle have been sold around here from \$15 to \$22.50 profit realized per head. (July 8, 1879)

Old Medley's District (3rd Election District)

Hoping a brief history of old Medley's (3rd Election) District may not be altogether uninteresting to you and to the many readers of your newsy Advocate I will attempt to give you as correct a description of it and its people as I can, without entering into minor details.

She has an area of 98 square miles and a population of from 3,500 to 4,000.

The climate is sufficiently mild for the successful growth of all the cereals, and in many of our greenhouses will be found at the proper season, the lemon tree laden with perfect fruit.

The principal products are wheat, tobacco and corn, although rye, oats, hay and potatoes are grown but mostly for home consumption. About 75 acres each will be the average crop put in wheat and corn each year by the farmers. Hogs are raised in great numbers and we can now boast of some very fine stock. J. N. Allnutt has added to his herd some choice animals from the best strains of blood imported to this country. Sheep, owing to the dogs, are handled by very few farmers, though some fine flocks spot the district. Cattle, next to wheat and corn, is the leading pursuit; great numbers are bought between the 15th of September and the 1st of December of each year. I think I can safely say from 2,000 to 2,500 are owned here. Our cattle commission merchants, Messrs. Williams and Poole, Howard Griffith and N. G. Howe informed me they have handled 1,900 stock and as many fat cattle; besides some of our farmers buy at Grover's Rest and Queenstown.

Farmers commence feeding corn about the 1st of January and aim to give one peck per day to each steer, one half shock of fodder until the 10th of April and in addition they are allowed free access to stream water and salt. There is some diversity of opinion regarding keeping them in close quarters or allowing them the fields to roam over; the latter method is usually allowed. I think we will average 50 per cent profit.

Horses are raised principally for the use of the farmer, though there is a considerable surplus. Heavy horses are handled too much, I think.

(Medley District) is nearly bounded by water and her springs are noted. Timber is somewhat scarce, but there is a sufficiency for many years to come. She is noted for her building stone; three quarries, two of red sandstone at Seneca and a marble quarry near Edwards' Ferry.

She owns 19 schools, 17 churches, 30 stores, seven large warehouses, four depots on the Metropolitan branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, 5 shipping points on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, 7 flour and corn mills and minor steam thrashers and saw mills.

Social News

The Dawsonville Literary Sociable will reorganize for the fourth season at 7 o'clock, Dec. 31st.

The past history of the Dawsonville Literary Society chronicles no more brilliant and pleasant meeting than one which took place at the handsome parlors of Mrs. H. C. Allnutt, of No. 27 Front Street, on Friday evening last.

At 8:15 P.M. elite guests to the number of 75 had congregated to do honor to the invitation given for its unique entertainment. The charming hostess, with her dignified sister, Miss Anna Veirs of Rockville, received with courteous pleasantry and directed guests to the polite usher, Mr. Lawrence Allnutt, who gracefully escorted them to their cloak and dressing rooms.

The President in the chair called the meeting to order at 8:30 P.M. and after some cavil, dispatched regular business, including the election of officers, the result of which was the re-election of its present incumbents, Messrs. Eastham, Allnutt, Hickerson and Miss M. C. Darby.

Evening programs were then called.

Miss Susie Darby read "New Church Organ" and acquitted herself very creditably

Mr. Charles Cross's debut was good in declaiming "Tomorrow"

Miss Nellie Allnutt gave a flattering rendition of "Beauty"

Mr. C. A. Saunders and N. S. Allnutt recited very comely a dialogue entitled "Fox and Ranger"

Miss Annie L. Dade read very oratorically "Maud Muller"

Mr. Jack Darby, assisted by his accommodating sister, Miss Carrie Darby, sustained himself with much credit and they highly entertained in operatic style with "Cat and Dog"

Mr. R. T. Dade agreeably surprised all by reading "Charcoal"

Dr. N. S. White entertained by reading well an essay on "History", the language of which was sound and very chaste.

Miss Annie M. Dade recited amusingly "Socrates and Xantippe"

Mr. V. M. Hickerson divertingly sustained himself as a humorist by reading "Too Late for the Train"

(By invitation) Mr. B. T. White fluently declaimed "Eloquence of Action" by Webster

The Society called Miss Annie L. Dade to recite "Rock of Ages" which she meritoriously rendered

This closed the program for the evening and the Society thereupon adjourned.

At 11:30 P.M. the hostess handed out an inviting lunch; one of the many proofs that she is a superior housekeeper. After the company had regaled themselves with the delicacies prepared to satisfy the most fastidious, they were invited to the dancing saloon where the sweet strains of music elicited from the noted string band of the celebrated musician Prof. Norman of Black Rock soon had the guests whirling in the Boston, lancers and other late dances which continued until "Crown's Rooster" announced its approach. Then all departed in merriment well satisfied that they had had a boss time.

The marriage of Mr. Arthur Williams to Miss Annie E. Dawson at the residence of the bride's father, James M. Dawson, Fair Prospect on Wednesday the 18th inst. was one of the happiest and prettiest events of the season.

The house was prettily and tastefully decorated with evergreens and flowers. Large festoons of evergreens were suspended from each corner of the parlor and caught in the center of the room, from which suspended a large and handsome marriage bell composed of daphne, bouvardia, geraniums, heliotrope and other flowers of the

season; a large calla lily entwined with smilax forming a clapper.

The bride was looking very sweet and pretty and was attired in a garnet silk and velvet, hair dressed low on her neck with silver comb; her only adornments were diamond earrings which were worn by her mother and grandmother on similar occasions.

I will recapitulate from my diary our doings since Monday week last
Monday - Informal evening entertainment at Miss Vallie W. Allnutt's
Tuesday - Mrs. H. C. Allnutt's
Wednesday - Concert at Darnestown
Thursday - Miss Annie Dawson's
Friday - Miss V. W. Allnutt
Saturday - Miss A. L. Dawson's
Sunday - Church; afternoon call on "Morpheus"
Monday - Reception at Rockland for some twenty or thirty ladies and gentlemen
for the sprightly Miss Rosalie Poole of Poolesville
This evening - at Eminence, home of Miss Bessie Darby
Tomorrow - at Farwan

OTHER FUN ACTIVITIES

The Dawsonville croquet Club organized on Saturday last and will continue every Saturday during the summer.

Miss M. C. Darby's quilting bee takes place tomorrow - a good time expected.

Cards are out for a dance at Gaiety Hall, Poolesville for Friday night 23rd.

Many of the pleasure seekers of Dawsonville and Poolesville attended the grand tournament at Leesburg yesterday.

Mr. H. C. Allnutt, esq. entertains the Poolesville Brass Band tomorrow evening. Quite an assembly of young folks are expected to be present and partake of the hospitality of the Bachelors Haste (July, 1880)

A grand picnic and dance will be held in the woods adjoining the town of Dawsonville on the 3rd of July. A celebrated string band from Washington will be in attendance and no means spared to make it a success.

(A floater announces:

The Seneca Basket Picnic

in the grove at Dawsonville, Md.

Tuesday Aug. 26, 1873

at 9 o'clock A.M.

The celebrated cornet band from Leesburg, Va. and the unexcelled String Band from Frederick City will be in attendance.

Editor's Note - The Society is grateful to Mrs. Sween for making it possible for us to get these glimpses of "the good old days". The wealth of detail which we have not been able to include in this issue of the Story make her history extremely valuable.

We wish that others could be inspired to do for their communities what Mrs. Sween has done for Dawsonville and Seneca.