

Daniel W. Douglass and Hanner Fenner

*(The parents of infant **Carlton Crane Douglass**, buried at Pioneer Cemetery)*

by Douglas Shepard

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In the Winter issue of this newsletter, we offered some anecdotes involving the witty **Daniel W. Douglass**. One of them recounted his going a-courting at the home of two young ladies out on East Main Street, meeting his boarding house partner, **Joshua Turner**, on his early morning return, and trying to disguise himself as a tramp.

There is an interesting corollary to this story told by **Douglass'** grandson, **Lewis Douglass Green(e)**, in the *Fredonia Censor* of May 20, 1896. **Greene** had recently received from his aunt **Mary Douglass** in Alameda, CA, a letter written by his grandmother in **March 1818**. She had just arrived in Fredonia from Providence, RI, and was writing home to report on the trip.

To clarify the letter, **Greene**, obviously calling on family stories that had been passed down to him, explained that his grandmother, **Hannah Fenner**, had "journeyed out to western New York with a family named **Simmons**". She lived in Fredonia for a year, "and then returned to Providence where she was married on October 31st 1819, to **Daniel W. Douglass**, whom she had met during her western sojourn at what had already been his home for some years." "At the time of **Hannah Fenner's** western visit, **Mr. Douglass** was an apprentice or clerk, in the employ of a merchant of the village. One day, **Hannah** rode into town down the 'West Hill' and to the village store to make some purchases, and was waited on by **Mr. Douglass**, who attracted by the face and manner of the fair newcomer, followed her out and assisted her to mount. Within a few weeks he appeared as her cavalier at a grand Fourth of July ball at the village tavern, and we may easily imagine the rural gossip and interest in this apparent case of mutual 'love on first sight'."

After some genealogical details about the **Fenner** and **Douglass** families, **Greene** goes on to explain references in the letter itself. **J. Sprague** was **Jonathan Sprague**. **Dinah** was **Hannah's** older half sister married to **Jonathan's** older brother **Thomas Sprague**, and **Uncle Arthur** was **Capt. Arthur Fenner** of Herkimer, NY.

The letter, addressed to "**Mrs. Welthan Fenner**, Providence, R.I." is as follows:

Dear Mother:

*We arrived at our destined port the 23 all in good health and spirits [.] met with no accidents except the Waggons failing [-] was not detained long in that way [.] the country looks very new to me here [.] don't expect to be discontented [.] we are to move today to a house **Mr. Sprague** has prepared for them of his own in sight of the one he lives in[.] I stood the journey very well after getting seasoned to it which was not under six days [.] I was seasick with riding [-] never remember ever feeling worse [.] whenever they stopped felt intirely well [.] but they never lay by any on my account[.] I don't think you could have stood the journey in the way that we came[-] which was more comfortable than any familys that we saw on the road[.] which was a great many[.] I am not able to inform you what I shall do this summer[.] expect I can have a school If I want to undertake it[.] sewing I can get as much as I can do for they tell me so [.] Mantua makers are scarce here and I have not told them that I was not one[.] I want very much to hear from you and where you are[.] shall expect a letter from you after you receive this[.] feel in hopes that you have seen or heard from my Dear Brother[.] know not when I shall but expect if you do you will let me know it and if you see him try to get him to write to me[.] I wish to be remembered to **Dinah** and all the family[.] can't conveniently write to them as I have nothing to write but what they will hear so many times over[.] wish them to write to me every opportunity[.] I was very much disappointed as to the country[.] the people[.] them that live in any order are more particular than they are in Providence as to Dress and everything else[.] we have passed through a great many Beautiful Villages where the Buildings was handsomer and the streets than ever I saw before.*

*J. Sprague has got a very handsome house[.] the country looks new around him but very pleasant[.] Mrs. Sprague is an Agreeable Woman[.] handsome and very particular indeed[.] the children **Patty** and **Ruth** are little fat girls[.] Look exactly like **Dinah's** children[.] **Patty** is bright enough[.] they expect to set out for Rhode Island the last of June[.] when if nothing happens you will hear from me again[.] then I expect to write something more satisfactory than I can at present for I dont know whether I shall like living here or not[.] dont know how long **Mr. Simmons** will live in this place. Think it a chance if he settles in this neighborhood [.] We did not come by way of **Uncle Colegroves** nor have I ever heard from them[.] I unexpectedly came by where **Samuel Fenner** lives[.] he has got a handsome house and keeps tavern on the Mohawk Turnpike in a pleasant place[.] we took breakfast there[.] was much pleased with his wife[.] **Uncle Arthur Fenner** lives within 4 miles of the road we came[.] have nothing more to write at present but remain your Only Daughter **Hannah Fenner**.*

This whole story casts a slightly different light on the earlier story **Douglass** told on himself. **Hannah Fenner** came to **Fredonia** in March, **1818**, met **Douglass** at the store in June, was squired to the Fourth of July dance by him, and finally returned to Rhode Island somewhere in or after March, **1819**.

While she was gone, **Joshua Turner** made his first appearance in Fredonia, advertising on April 6, **1819**, his newly established saddle and harness-making shop in the village. So it had to have been after that, in the spring or summer of **1819**, that **Daniel W. Douglass** went calling on the two young ladies on East Main Street, at a time when the village knew he and **Hannah** had found 'love on first sight'. No wonder he hid his face from **Turner** and tried to disguise himself as a passing tramp. Nevertheless, we are relieved to know that all came out right, and on October 31, **1819**, he and **Hannah** were wed.

Notes: The **Simmons** family **Hannah** travelled west with, was **Seth Simmons** and his wife **Freelove Sprague**, sister of **Jonathan Sprague**, also originally from Providence, R.I. It was **Jonathan's** older brother **Thomas**, who was married to **Hannah's** older half sister, **Dinah**.

Simmons had articulated some 70 acres in **1816** out on West Main Street not far from **Jonathan Sprague's** holdings. **Hannah's** remark about the house prepared for them by the **Spragues** and her questioning whether **Simmons** would even stay in the area, suggest that **Seth Simmons**, although he owned the land, was not living on it and was only now bringing his family out to live in a home belonging to the **Spragues**. (**Jonathan Sprague** had become rich as a sea captain in the West India trade before moving to western New York. In **1820** his property was assessed at \$4,842 compared to **Simmons'** \$421. He could well afford to help out his young sister's family).

The two chubby little **Sprague** girls were **Patty**, then five, and **Ruth**, three, the first two of **Jonathan** and **Susan D. Sprague's** seven children. The next oldest, **Thomas**, would not be born until May, **1818**, some two months after **Hannah** wrote her letter.

The store in which **Daniel W. Douglass** was a clerk was his brother-in-law, **Jacob Houghton's**. Originally, **Houghton**, a lawyer married to **Daniel's** older sister, **Lydia**, had visited this area in June, **1811**. He arranged to have a house built in Mayville, where the new courthouse was located. That September he returned only to find no house had even been started. Turning back, he made his way to Irving and established a store there alongside the Cattaraugus Creek. **Daniel** acted as clerk there and then in Fredonia when the family moved here in **1812**. The ledger for the business is still extant, among the **Foote** papers at the Chautauqua County Historical Society museum in Westfield, and includes many entries for **D.W. Douglass** and the **Houghtons**, as well as **Jonathan Sprague**.

The two young ladies on East Main Street whom **Douglass** was calling on could not have been the **Rev. Joy Handy's** daughter, who were about seven and ten in **1819** (the **Handys** lived about where **226 East Main Street** is today), so they must have been in the **Oliver** and **Isaac Barnes** families. We do not have any names, but the **1820** Census shows at least one young woman of the right age still at home there.

Daniel Wetherell Douglass married **Hannah Fenner** 10/31/1819 in Providence R.I. She died in **1839**. Their children were **Edward Fenner** (bn **1820**), **Carlton Crane** (b. **1825**), **Ann Elizabeth (Mrs. Joseph N.) Green** (b. **1828**), **Franklin** (b. **1833**) and **George** (b. **1834**). [*Carlton died as an infant and is buried in*

Pioneer Cemetery.]

His sister, **Lydia Douglass**, was married to **Jacob Houghton** with whom he lived when he first came to Fredonia. His son, **Edward**, married **Jonathan Sprague's** daughter, **Susan**, and **D.W. Douglass's** grandmother was a **Margaret Abell**, so the **Abells** as well as the **Spragues, Douglasses, Simmonses**, and **Houghtons** may all have been related.