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 entirely 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 Dinahs 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
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**, **Simmons**, and **Houghtons** may all have been related.