

**“A Chautauqua Family” --  
“The Story of the Cushings”**

**Prepared by  
Charles M. Reed  
of Sinclairville**

**for the**

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of the  
State Historical Society**

**held at**

**Chautauqua, N.Y.**

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It seems especially fitting that the State Historical Society meet here on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the place.

We have seen the little Fair Point Camp Meeting develop into the noble Institution which has made the name "Chautauqua" known in every corner of the civilized world.

The territory where we are convened has been part in turn of six counties, Albany, Iryan, Montgomery, Ontario, Genesee and Chautauqua.

In 1801 one more town of Batavia, Genesee County and the next year became the sovereign Township of Chautauqua.

In 1800 the Holland Land Company had about completed its survey and the only resident within our borders was an axeman of the Land Co., Amos Sottile, who had a log cabin near the mouth of Cattaraugus Creek and this was the only house between New Amsterdam and Presque Isle - the present cities of Buffalo and Erie.

But Sottile was a rover and soon disappeared.

In 1802 Col. James McMahan and party came in and started a settlement in the west part of the village of Westfield. Col. McMahan purchased land which he cleared and cultivated and he was the first bona fide settler. The main road passed his cabin and the Portage Road from Lake Erie to Chautauqua Lake crossed it which gave to the locality the name of Cross-roads and this became the seat of town government with the County seat at Batavia.

In 1806, Captain Mack erected a commodious log house near the ruins of Umas Sittiles shack. He established a ferry across Cattaraugus Creek, kept a tavern and acted as salesman for the Holland Land Company.

Traffic was increasing and in 1811, it is said, the woods were full of land hunters, speculators and prospective settlers, seeking open glades in the forest, water power, timber, blue clay banks, building stone and limestone for burning.

This section was being peopled by heroes and heroines whose history, except in comparatively few cases, never has been written and only comes to light through story and tradition.

One great purpose of the Chautauqua County Historical Society has been and is to search out all possible history and have it recorded in our archives.

We have acquired many such and the mark still is being pursued.

An outstanding figure in our early history is Zattu Cushing, a man of distinguished lineage but one who performed the days duty and planned for the next with no thought of ancestry.

Born at Plymouth, Mass. in 1770, one of a family of thirteen (13) children, he received little indoor teaching, but his education in industry, energy, self-reliance and integrity proved more valuable than college courses and normal training.

In youth he was bound out to a ship carpenter and after his apprenticeship worked at the trade for a considerable time in Boston Harbor.

Inclining to a farmer's life he journeyed to Saratoga County where his health failed and his means became exhausted; so he shouldered his axe and went on foot to Oneida County where in 1795 he was married to Rachel Buckingham, who was a worthy companion and efficient helpmate in his subsequent journeyings and adventures in the wilderness.

In 1799 he was engaged to go to Presque Isle and superintend the building of a ship which was named the Good Intent and was the first ever built on Lake Erie.

On his journey he stopped overnight at a spot near Canadaway Creek which leased his fancy and where six years later he established his new home.

The title Canadaway is not derived from the fact that the stream wends its way toward Canada, but from an Indian word meaning "running through the hemlocks, ga-na-da-way-o which eastern nasal pronunciation quickly corrupted into Ca-na-da-way.

In February 1805, he started out with two men, four cows, two large sleds, drawn by oxen, carrying his wife and five children and all his worldly goods, including a box of tools, a barrel of salt, a half bushel of appleseeds, a bag of peach pits and the family dinner korn.

It was a wearisome journey to Buffalo which he reached early in March and, thinking to find easier travel over the ice, he took that route intending to go ashore and camp at night. But at late afternoon a terrible tempest with black snow clouds unexpectedly came on them and forced a halt.

Using the cattle and seeds as a wind break, the travelers endeavored to make themselves comfortable. But water was showing through the snow in some places, darkness was upon them, a near point of land was wholly uncertain, the party dared not move, but Mr. Cushing, with great blasts on the dinner horn hoped to attract help from the shore.

About one o'clock in the morning two men who had heard the signal of distress came with fat pine torches and piloted them to safety and shelter.

Daylight showed them that the ice was so broken up that other escape was impossible.

A few days later the little caravan reached the site of the present village of Fredonia.

The only other shelter to be found was an uncompleted log cabin, well-roofed, but with no door, no chinking between the logs and no floor.

However, they made a thick carpet of hemlock boughs, hung blankets over the doorway and at the corners of the room and built a fire and confessed themselves lucky and reasonably content and happy.

Mr. Cushing and his men, at once began constructing a commodious loghouse and clearing land for the seasons crops, the cattle meanwhile subsisting on browse, potatoes for planting were not to be had but Mr. Cushing had the good fortune to obtain six bushels from the Indians twelve miles to the east. He commenced a nursery with the apple seeds, and peach pits he so thoughtfully had brought and sixty years later a local historian averred that all the orchards for miles round sprang from Cushings' stock.

The nearest physician was at Buffalo. For three years there was no mail; then a man on foot carried it tied in his handkerchief. The nearest gristmill was at Niagara Falls, but most settlers had a housing block and crushed the corn and wheat with a heavy pestle hung from a spring pole and operated by hand.

Once a year some settlers went by sleigh to Utica to procure medicines, clothing and other necessities.

Recorded incidents in Zattu Cushing's activities indicate that he was a prodigious worker, intensely interested in developing the region; ever solicitous for the welfare of all settlers near and far and especially devoted to erecting mills and schools. He built the first church, he constructed boats and imported goods from Buffalo and Erie and erected a log store house at the mouth of Canadaway Creek where later occurred the first bloodshed of the War of 1812.

Nor was he lacking in political acumen. Until 1808 the annual Town Meeting was held at Cross-roads.

That year he rallied every voter from his side of the Township and procured a resolution changing the place of meeting to Holmes Settlement – now Sheridan, and here the regular meeting was held in a log barn.

Balm was given the west side of town by giving it the office of the supervisor, Mr. Cushing was elected Justice of the Peace and Overseer of the Poor. At this same time an effort was made to have Chautauqua Town set up as a separate county with two townships, Pomfret and Chautauqua. This was finally consummated by the Act of the Legislature in 1811.

In that same year, 1808, Zattu Cushing was appointed Associate Justice of Niagara County, which then included Erie County, and for three years he sat in regular terms of the district, holding court in what was known as Landlords Tavern in New Amsterdam.

On organization in 1811 of the new county it was inevitable that Zattu Cushing should be chosen as its first Judge, a position he filled until 1822 when he voluntarily retired.

His record shows that he possessed a clear analytical and judicial mind while his ancestry indicates that few if any families have furnished more eminent lawyers and judges and Supreme Courts. Judge Cushing retired with the reputation of an upright, dignified, pure-minded and clear-headed magistrate.

He died at Fredonia in 1839 and at the next term of Court following the eulogies upon the distinguished citizen a resolution was passed to have a picture of Judge Cushing made and hung in the Supreme Court chamber.

Judge Cushing was twice married and had eight children of the first marriage and four of the second. The fourth child was Milton Buckingham Cushing. He graduated from Hamilton College and took up medicine and surgery.

Following the "westward ho" slogan, he practiced in Ohio, Illinois and Wisconsin.

He was twice married, the father of nine children and died at Gallapolis, Ohio in 1847, aged 47, and shortly afterwards the widow and her children removed to Fredonia where the Academy, a pet institution of their grandfather, in its twenty-odd years of existence had become a prominent

seat of learning and offered much for her children. Her maiden name was Mary Barker Smith. She was a woman of superior intellectual gifts and traits of moral character. In her last years, many honors came to her for great patriotism and the heroic sacrifices she made.

Her sons who grew to manhood were Milton, Howard, Alonso and William. The same fearless intrepid spirit of Zattu Cushing and the intense love of country of their Spartan mother led these gallant youths to enlist in the Union forces.

Milton entered the Navy at the outbreak of hostilities, distinguished himself in action and was promoted on no less than three occasions and finally became pay master of the Navy in which position he continued for several years after the War. His last service was with the fleet in the Mediterranean. He married a daughter of Thomas P. Grosvener, once County Judge of our county.

Howard Cushing is described as of medium height, spare and sinewy and quick as a cat, with bluish-grey eyes that saw everything, looked through on as he spoke and hinted the determination, coolness and energy that made his name famous, especially in post-War service in the Southwest.

He enlisted in the Artillery, participated in many important engagements, was supporting Grant's army in the Siege of Vicksburg. Having re-enlisted he was made First Lieutenant in the cavalry and was sent to Arizona where various Indian tribes were off their reservations, running off stock, murdering ranchers and pillaging their homes.

In May 1871 the Chiricahua Apaches were on a rampage and Lieut. Cushing, with twenty men were sent to quell the disorder. They were led into an ambush, fired upon and he and several of his men were killed.

This is but one of many desperate encounters he was in. He had rendered such notable services in that section, that the citizens of Tucson have erected a splendid monument to his memory.

Alonso Hereford Cushing graduated at West Point in June 1861. He immediately entered the Union Army and perhaps no other man of the age of twenty ever had so varied and exciting experiences in two years as he.

He was in the Manassas campaigns, the first battle of Bull Run, served in the defenses of Washington, was with the Army of the Potomac in the Peninsular Campaign, was aide to Gen. Sumner, at the Siege of Yorktown, the several days operations before Richmond, in the Maryland, the Rapananneck and the Pennsylvania Campaigns, the skirmish at Thoroughfare Gap and finally at Gettysburg where at the close of the second days battle he was promoted to be Lieut. Col. For especial gallantry in action.

On the next day, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1863 – he was in command of Battery A, 14<sup>th</sup> US Artillery. In the afternoon he was receiving the brunt of Picketts' on the terrific charge at the "Bloody Angle" of Cemetery Ridge where the carnage was so great that he was the last man standing and leaning on the last gun, an arm broken and a thigh shattered, when Brig. Gen. Webb gave an order to retire. "One more shot Gen. Webb", he replied, pulled the lanyard and as the gun belched its roar of defiance, he fell dead with a shot through the head.

Gen. Sumner, who commanded that division of the Army, said of him, "He was the bravest man I ever knew."

A marker to his memory was placed on the field by members of another regiment who had witnessed Col. Cushing's last stand; and another stone marking the spot where he fell was erected by members of yet another regiment which had been in that memorable fight. Lieut-Col. Cushing died at the age of 22 and was buried at West Point; the grave is marked by a Parisian marble stone and, on the beautiful Victory monument in the Academy Park, is an inscription, 44<sup>th</sup> U.S. Artillery "and under this lines, in bronze letters, "Alonzo H. Cushing".

William B. Cushing was born at Delafield, Wisconsin in 1842. Five years later his widowed mother and her children removed to Fredonia, N.Y. where Zattu Cushing and others of the family resided. The Fredonia Academy in its twenty years of existence, a pet establishment of Judge

Cushing's, had become the foremost institution of learning in this part of the state and here the young Cushings were schooled.

Judge Edwards of Dunkirk was our Representative in Congress and in 1856 he took William with him to Washington to act as a page in the House and, before the close of the session, procured his appointment as a cadet at Annapolis. Also Judge Edwards procured the appointment of Alonzo Cushing to West Point.

After three and a half years at Annapolis the young man resigned, and, while visiting friends in Massachusetts, after a severe examination and practical tests in navigation and on recommendation of Rear Admiral Smith, a relative of his mother, he was given a mission and assigned to duty on the frigate Minnesota, sailing from Boston Harbor, the frigate reached Hampton Roads on May 1861 and on the very first night after its arrival, captured the Delaware Farmer, the first prize of war. Then for weeks with the blockade squadron off the Carolina coast, back to the Hampton Roads in August; thence, with the largest fleet that had ever assembled to Hatteras Inlet swarming with privateers and blockade runners and guarded by two forts, where a fierce engagement occurred such as had thrilled his fancy many a time and kindled an unlimited eagerness to plunge into every exciting and dangerous adventure for the honor of his country's flag.

He was with the fleet in Hampton Roads, when the Merrimac made its first appearance, sank the Cumberland, the Congress and, on the following day, destroyed the Minnesota. That was the day the "Yankee cheese box on a raft" had the memorable fight with the Merrimac and put her past future danger to the Union.

There was not a year during the war that Lieut. Cushing did not distinguish himself by some perilous undertaking, and following each success came commendations of governors, city boards of trade, congratulation from Admirals, and Generals and Representatives of Congress and praise and thanksgiving from President Lincoln.

One night he rowed up the Cape Fear River to Smithville where a Confederate general had headquarters. Posting his men at convenient places, he made his way into the house, lighted a candle so to find the general's bedroom, entered and awoke the officer who started up only to find a big navy revolver in his face and in fear and trembling, surrendered up all his papers and plans. A hue and cry was raised outside and in fleeing from the house the Lieutenant knocked down and carried off a man later found to be Chief Engineer of the forces there.

On another occasion he boldly entered the enemy's lines in broad daylight, hid in the brush until a carrier with mail for Richmond and came sauntering by, when he rushed out and, intimidating the rider with a pistol, captured the mail and, with his men escaped again without a scratch.

On another night he and his men slyly boarded the richly laden blockade runner, Charlotte, silenced the guard with scarcely a sound, descended to the cabin of the Captain who was entertaining some British officers at a banquet, demanded surrender of the boat and received it while his guests sat tongue-tied with astonishment.

At a much later date and while in command of the flag ship Malvern, which was directly after his promotion to Lieutenant Commander, he with a few men in small craft were for six hours, under a rain of shot and shell, engaged in setting buoys to mark the channel in the river.

Some historians and naval observers have declared this the very bravest act of all since death hovered over him and his men every instant.

The incidents related are stepping stones to the story of the Albemarle.

Most school histories mention this event and some others refer to it in a casual way. Greeley's "American Conflict" gives it twenty lines and Pollard's "Lost Cause" gives it four and does not give the name of either boat or commander.

The Albemarle was an ironclad even more formidable than the Merrimac and had done great damage to Union shipping and its destruction was necessary. It was conspicuous in the capture of Plymouth, it sank the Southfield, and many smaller craft. It attacked the Miami, a shot from which rebounded from the Ironclad and killed Capt. Flusser of the Miami, a friend of Cushing's who is said to have vowed vengeance.

As early as June 1864, Lieut. Cushing, then commanding the Monticello, formulated a plan for its destruction which he submitted to Admiral Lee who took it to the Board of War Strategy where Cushing's previous successes inspired such confidence that the plan was approved. He was withdrawn from active service and commissioned to this special service.

While his outfit was being prepared the lieutenant visited his mother at Fredonia and one day taking a drive with her, through the Arkwright Hills, he told her all his plans for the expedition.

This is fully authenticated and recorded and should silence the statement sometimes made that the drive was ill advised.

The Albemarle had been lying for some weeks by the Plymouth on the Roanoke, guarded by the fort. A mile behind a picket was mounted on the wreck of the Smithfield.

On the night of October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1864 Cushing with thirteen men of his own selection, in a thirty foot steam launch bearing at its bow a long-arm terminating in a huge torpedo, ran up the river (unreadable), and discovered the great ironclad, protected by a boom of logs about thirty feet from its sides.

The first plan was to board the ram by surprise if possible and run her off downstream. But a boom of logs had not been anticipated.

As the launch touched the logs, she was discovered. The (crew) opened fire and almost instantly flares lit up the scene. Witness the lieutenant's rapidity of comprehension and resourcefulness, his ability to perfect a new plan in the twinkling of an eye.

**A line had been attached to the engineer's leg for communicating orders without sound.**

**A reply shot was sent against the ironclad, the little launch rapidly circled and, with full speed ahead, struck the boom head on, driving the launch far enough up on the logs for the torpedo to be pushed under the ram's side.**

**Simultaneously with a rebel shot which tore away some of the Lieutenants clothes, came the terrific explosion which wrecked both the launch and the Albemarle and marked the doom of wooden ships in the Navy. Calling to his men to save themselves, Cushing divested himself of revolvers, shoes and most of his clothing, dropped in the water and swam down stream followed by a fusillade of bullets. Swimming and floating until exhausted he reached a clump of bushes on the river bank where he lay with feet in the water, listening to continued shots and excited rebel yells until he lost consciousness. Dawn showed him he was not far from the fort where he could see a sentry patrolling the parapet. As the sentry's back was turned, Cushing rose and ran a few yards and again dropped in the rushes and mire. Hearing men approaching he lay still, almost breathless until they passed – so near they barely missed stepping on him. Rolling over, he propelled himself by heels and elbows into a morass of mud and briars through which, bare-headed, bare-handed and bare-footed, he made his way till blood flowed from innumerable cuts and bruises. In the outskirts of the woods he saw an old colored man to whom he gave a piece of money he happily had in his remnants of clothing, to go and learn the result of the explosion. Vibrating between suspense and fear of betrayal he rested until the Negro returned with word that the Albemarle was a complete wreck (The government subsequently salvaged the wreck for \$200,000.00).**

**This was more inspiring than food and drink and gave him strength to cover several miles when he came upon a large stream. On the opposite bank a detachment of Confederates was enjoying a belated dinner while a little skiff tied to a cypress root lay in the water under the bank. Silently Cushing slipped into the water, swam to the boat, untied it and, pushing it until he rounded a curve he scrambled in and paddled away for dear life until he reached the Roanoke.**

**The Sound was but a few miles away where he knew the fleet would be. At last in the dead of night he made out the picket boat and calling "Ship ahoy" fell senseless in the bottom of the skiff.**

**On regaining consciousness he found himself on shipboard and on way to the flag ship where soon he was among friends who scarcely could believe the reality of it all.**

**For his exploit he was promoted to Lieutenant Commander received the Engrossed Thanks of Congress and the plaudits of the entire Union.**

**To write all one would wish of this remarkable man and his heroic experiences would fill a volume with soul stirring exploits for more thrilling than the wildest tales of fiction. This sketch is somewhat extended because Commander Cushing seems more intimately associated with our county.**

**In 1870 he married the belle of Fredonia, Kate the elder daughter of Col. David S. Forbes and that village continued to be his home until he died in 1874, aged but thirty-two.**

**Mrs. Cushing was an active member of our County Historical and, for several years, its Treasurer.**

**Their two daughters also enthusiastic members and have offered material – private papers and letters – that would amplify this essay much beyond the time limit, but let us say in conclusion on that the heroism and sacrifices of Zattu Cushing have been justified and glorified in his descendants.**

**This then is our presentation of a Chautauqua Family and the Story of the Cushings.**