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**MEMORIAL TO  
OBED EDSON**

**BY**

**CHARLES REED**

# **MEMORIAL**

**To Honorable Obed Edson, late President  
Emeritus and former President of the  
Chautauqua County Historical Society –  
Presented at the annual meeting at  
Mayville, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1920**

**By C.M. Reed**

**Of Sinclairville, N.Y.**

I picture a little 4 year old boy – hatless, barefoot, clad in cotton trousers and pinafore, crouching furtively behind the clumps of marigold and hollyhocks that grew beside the big read house on Kent Road which led over the hill to the old Indian trail winding northeasterly to Buffalo.

This little fellow was cautiously peering out – quite in wonder, much in fear - at a train of wagons crawling up the grade.

All summer the days had possessed a mysterious feeling of suspense and nights brought a sense of terror – an indefinable unrest, beyond the ken of 4 year olds, seemed to hover about everybody and everything. It was not swifts, or ghosts, or the blood-thirsty gyastacutis (?) that swallowed little folks whole, but nevertheless, something fearful impended and children did not wander out of earshot or let dark find them out of doors. The time was September of the troublous year 1836.

In February preceding, the Land Office at Mayville had been demolished and the records burned by desperate men: The Holland Land Co. had threatened awful vengeance upon the guilty parties if they could be discovered; officers of the law were said to be haunting the highways and

byways of the countryside; neighbors put their heads together when they stopped to chat; parents and the grown-ups concerned in an excited but strangely quiet way and inquisitive youngsters were told that little pitchers had too large ears. Fathers cautioned sons to behave well lest a constable or land agent gobble them up and mothers enjoined daughters to be good girls and mind Mamma or a night raider might carry them off. The timid little boy hiding among the tall flowers had been told that a new English family would pass there that day and, without a fair comprehension of what a new English family was, he believed in Safety First and proposed being securely hidden if it seemed at all dangerous. The wagons lumbered by – 1, 2, 3, and behind the last, bravely trudged a red-cheeked lad of his own size, appearing quite like other boys, agreeable, rather than terrifying. Then the little boy of the big red house put out his head from the flower stalks and called a friendly hoo-oo-oo and the ruddy little chap behind the wagon swung his cap and called back a cheerful hoo-oo-oo and so began a friendship that endured for more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a century.

Me. Edson made me this sketch of his introduction to my father. The Edson and the Reed families joined: the children played together, attended the same

school, grew to manhood, engaged in business, married and reared families in the same community.

So it happens that my acquaintance with Mr. Edson began with my earliest recollection: and at this point permit me to express my gratification and pride at being invited by the Chautauqua County Historical Society to present this memorial.

Obed Edson was born at Sinclairville, N.Y. on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1832 and resided there most of the days of his nearly 88 years. He attended the District School and Fredonia Academy but he was mainly self-taught. He took up Higher Mathematics, History, Science and Philosophy alone. Books, in his youth, were few and hard to get, but those he did obtain were masterpieces and he read and digested them all. The taste for reading clung to him all his days and he became a perfect cyclopedia of information. He kept abreast with the steps of Science, he knew not only History, but current events; he always read the leading novel of the season and was not adverse to selective stories and other trash as a mental recreation, while it was a surprising revelation to many people to learn of his knowledge of music, art and poetry.

At the age of 18 he was head chairman in the surveying camps on the western section of the Erie R.R. the year before its completion to Dunkirk and was studying surveying. The late S.M. Newton of Dunkirk, a prominent Civil Engineer, knew Mr. Edson's capability and often engaged his services and thus in 1867 entrusted him with running the location line of the Dunkirk & Warren Railroad, which all civil engineers know to have been a remarkable accomplishment.

This was but one of several very successful pieces of railroad work performed by him.

At 19 Mr. Edson began the study of law in the office of E.H. Sears at Sinclairville and after a course in the Albany Law School he was admitted to the Bar in 1853. Opening an office at Sinclairville, he continued in active practice then for 60 years. Mr. Edson was essentially a Counselor – a student, he was careful, and exhaustive as to details; he was conscientious, conservative and of clear analytical mind; he was of sound judgment and his counsel was always for settlement rather than litigation – peace rather than turmoil; he never cared to earn money, if it could be avoided, out of the disputes, disappointments or sorrows of his clients.

He was the old fashioned family lawyer with whom people trusted their business, their funds, their secrets and reputations; and he never betrayed a trust.

Mr. Edson was married May 11<sup>th</sup>. 1859 to a prominent young lady of his own village, Emily A. Allen, who proved as perfect a helpmate as man ever had. Mrs. Edson was an altogether delightful person – a devoted wife and mother – an exceptional homemaker, at once capable as housewife, seamstress, nurse, teacher – the best of neighbors, a sympathetic counselor and a good business manager. She was a woman of superior intellect, a great reader, and possessed of a fine literary taste. Always interested in her husband's affairs, she lent him valuable aid in the preparation of many of his published works.

To them 8 children were born, three of whom survive.

Mrs. Edson, after several years of cheerful invalidism, passed away on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1899.

Mr. Edson served his locality in various capacities as Justice , Assessor and Supervisor; as member of Boards of Trustees of Village School District, Library and Cemetery.

He was an active member of the Masonic order for sixty years. In 1862 he was first elected Master of Sylvan Lodge of Sinclairville. He was chosen for the position several other terms and 1912, in compliment of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his first election, he was again elected – At the State Conclave in New York that year he was Special Guest of Honor and placed on several important committees.

While Supervisor of Charlotte in 1867 and the following years, Mr. Edson took an active part in promoting the Dunkirk & Warren Railroad, persuading many towns to assist by bonding, and that his own township failed to get a foot of railroad for taxation purposes, was due solely to its topography and not to any lack of desire and effort on his part.

In 1874, r. Edson was elected Assemblyman for the old Second District which included both Jamestown and Dunkirk, and is the only Democrat ever

elected in that district and, in fact, the only one in the whole county except the late Charles H. Corbett of Sherman elected in 1882.

While in the Legislature, Mr. Edson obtained the enactment of the first law in the State for establishing Free Circulating Libraries and the one in his own village is the first one organized under that Law.

Mr. Edson was always progressive and gave his influence and energy in support of what seemed best for his community. He was the leading spirit in establishing the Sinclairville High School, in improving the local cemetery until it came to be known as the most beautiful one in the state aside from Greenwood and Mt. Hope.

He vigorously urged the incorporation of his Village, the improvement of its roads and walks, the purchase and improvement of the water works and strict observance of the rules of Sanitation while his paternal interest in the school and public libraries has made them the best of any locality of its size.

In the field of original historical research, Mr. Edson had no superior in this part of the land. To him the study of History was recreation, and his

knowledge was general, extending to all the great events of world history, their influence upon nations and their effect upon civilization.

It was often a surprise to his friends who knew him as peculiarly a local historian, to discover a familiarity with ancient, biblical and medieval history and his clear-cut analysis of modern history – especially of English and European turmoils – and his memory for dates was particularly remarkable.

In 1876, Mr. Edson published the History of the Town of Charlotte and from that time he has been variously engaged in the publication of historical works.

He has been a contributor to various publications. In 1879 the Magazine of American History published his account of Brodheads Expedition against the Indians on the upper Allegany, and its management has ever been eager for the products of his pen – many of which he has furnished.

He has prepared several local histories, contributed largely to Young's History of Chautauqua County, was principal author of a county history

published in 1894, has furnished articles for various newspapers, magazines and pamphlets, was the most extensive writer for the Centennial History of Chautauqua County – his “Annals” comprising 360 pages (and written in his 70<sup>th</sup> year) and, at the time his decease was engaged as Chief Writer of a new historical work.

Mr. Edson was one of the founders of this Society and was always an Officer and enthusiastic promoter.

From its inception he was one of the Executive Committee and helped to make the programs instructive and valuable. He served as its President for several years and when his failing powers demanded retirement from active service, he was named President Emeritus and continued such until his demise.

Prior to 19??, this Society included the word “Scientific” in its corporate name and our archives contain a large number of papers on scientific subjects, many of which were prepared by Mr. Edson. Also, he has written for publication articles on geology and archaeology that commanded the

attention of the scientific world and several of his essays are accepted as a standard of authority.

Besides this, Mr. Edson has written hundreds of newspaper articles of historical and scientific nature especially applicable to certain localities and has lectured on such subjects in this and neighboring counties.

He has also spoken and written on current events and topics of general interest to a great extent and has made a number of scrapbooks of much interest and value.

One of these is made up of newspaper clippings relating to other proceedings of this Society. Last year, after his eyesight was nearly gone he prepared it with the assistance of Mrs. Ruth Seaver of Sinclairville (our former Necrologist) and she sends it for presentation today.

Perhaps a Historical Society will not be interested in the legal successes of its honored President Emeritus important history. Mr. Edson was as "sure" a lawyer as any man could be, and more than once when he was beaten by all

of the inferior tribunals he has gone to the Court of Appeals and secured a victory.

In several instances he has sifted and assorted the rights and equities of the various contestants, and enunciate the rules of law applicable thereto, so as to elicit the commendation of the higher courts, and in each case to maintain a judgment for his clients.

In middle life Mr. Edson suffered much from dyspepsia but in his last few years he was remarkably well and vigorous and maintained an office practice until about five years ago when increasing lameness and failing sight compelled him to cease work and go to make his name with his son Walter at Falconer. Even then he was frequently called on as Counsel, and very shortly before his 87<sup>th</sup> birthday the county papers noticed the closing of a case in which he has acted as Reference.

But best of all, Mr. Edson was a Man; he was broadminded and just. He was clean of speech and thought and never spoke ill of anyone. He believed in the Shakespearian text "First to thine own self be true" and he was thoroughly conscientious.

“ He found tongues in trees

Books in running brooks

Serious in stones

And good in everything

And he enjoyed every day to its utmost.

Success brought him pleasure, disappointment taught him a lesson and he never repined over things that were past but looked forward to what might be gained.

Being a Historian he indulged much in reminiscence but he believed that the world progressed a little every day.

He was not one to sigh for “The good old times” for he believed that he lived in the most wonderful epoch and the best times of any age and he felt that this world held so much worth living for and enjoying as it came, that those who failed to appreciate it, were wasting time preparing for another.

One of his favorite quotations was “There’s so much good in the most of us, and so much bad in the best of us, that it doesn’t behoove any of us to talk about the rest of us.”

He had Charity for all – the Charity that is long suffering and is kind; he had faith in everything that is and hope for everything that may be. He seemed never to think of a time when he would be (??) move among us and he came down to the Valley of the Shadow to the mists with the same smile of satisfaction that he always wore.

Memorials are no more than carving letters on a tombstone, soon erased and forgotten; but to live uprightly and honorably as he has done, cheerfully shouldering each burden as it was offered and acquitting himself to the best of his ability, ever seeking to do unto others as he would that others should do unto him – and withal, laboring as he has wrought, he has erected a monument to his memory that will endure when shafts of stone and tablets of bronze are crumbled into dust.