

Aurelia Hunt Child and Ebenezer Child Pioneer Memories

By Jane Child Ryder (1823-1901), Julia Child Barber (1831-1904) and Lucy Ryder Meyer (1849-1922)



Child Homestead Erected 1849

In March before my third birthday (1828), my father and mother removed to De Kalb, St. Lawrence County (from Addison, VT). They took all their worldly goods with them, among which were a yoke of oxen, two cows, and a very fine rifle. At this time mother had a babe a month old, and myself. We rode in a sleigh drawn by oxen, and were many days on the road.

A strange man carried me across the lake (Champlain) in his arms. All walked, as the ice was supposed to be unsound. Mother took cold and was sick, and father laid by one or two days in consequence.

Having reached the neighborhood where father concluded to settle, (On today's Old De Kalb Canton Rd at the intersection with Risley Rd.) we found a temporary home in the house of a previous settler, while father cut and hewed logs from the forest, and with the help of the few settlers 'raised' the body of a log house into which we moved before the doors and windows were in. For which we waited until the following fall. Blankets and quilts were used as covering.

The site of our home had been selected by someone before, who abandoned it after a few weeks, in consequence of the breaking out of the War of 1812. The only improvement made however, was to clear about an acre and to plant a few apple seeds. The apple trees that grew from these seeds were a great delight to me in my child days.

My father and mother had good health and great energy, but were not overburdened with wealth. The first spring father made the house habitable, dug a well, and cleared land sufficient to raise quite a crop of corn. He felled the large trees and burned the brush and stumps and then planted the corn all around the prostrate trunks and stumps and raised a large crop. Until he could clear land for hay, he used to drive the cattle into the woods where they ate the tender twigs from the shrubs, and fallen trees. These along with corn stalks had to do for their food until the land was prepared for grass.

We often heard the howling of wolves around. I remember seeing only one. The great overshadowing forests that shut us in all around have long vanished, and in their place lie the smoothest and greenest of meadows now lie. JCR

The Child's were excellent neighbors. It is told how Ira Gardner came across the fields carrying an old fashion pine torch to get Aurelia Child to come to his house to assist the night his son Reuben was born. Obed S. Risley related how the fire at the house of his father, Admiral Nelson Risley went out and how he (Obed) went down to the Child farm through swamps into water above his knees to borrow fire that they might have fire for they had no flint to strike a spark. LRM

About 1835 a young carpenter came into our neighborhood. He boarded at my father's (Ebenezer) and built a shop near, on an irregular flat rock. This shop was used as a schoolhouse a part of the year and here I first attended school, though I had read all the few books I could get a hold of from an early age. (A note inserted here says that Jane Child could read well by the age of 3.)

There was a ladder extending to the roof of the shop where I first attended school. I don't know why it was left there. It was not uncommon for us children to climb to the rather flat roof of the building, which was literally founded on a rock. One day having received the affirmative answer to the common question of restless pupils in those days, "May I go out?" (The equivalent of a request for a bathroom pass today.)

I went out and forthwith proceeded to climb the ladder to view the landscape o'er from the ridge of the roof. It was wet with a recent rain and to my horror I began to slide. I dug my fingers into the slippery shingles, pressing against them with all my might. I saw that I could not stop and knew I would be dashed to death on the rocks below. As I reached the eaves of the roof in my slow descent, I could just touch the ladder with my outstretched foot. Enough with my desperate clinging to save me. I managed to get to it and to the ground.

When I entered the classroom the teacher, Lucy Sheppard, observed my pallor and told me, "If you are sick you had better go home."

Religious services were held in the shop or schoolhouse, once in two weeks. Young preachers came out for these services, some of whom if I mistake not, rose to considerable eminence in Methodist churches. They were often entertained at my father's house. A year or two later special meetings were held in the little shop and a "Methodist Class" was formed. (This is probably the beginning of the Risley neighborhood Class spoken of in local church records. ed) JCR

We would all gather around the great fireplace, in the front room of our log house, father, mother, our two brothers, younger than sister Jane who was the oldest. Jane taught in the winter and summer but was home in the Fall and Spring and helped a good deal about the work for the family. JCB

Mother used to weave cloth, not only for the use of her own family but for the neighbors as well. The loom was upstairs and Jane did the light housework and took care of us children while mother wove.

In the evening mother and Jane would both get their wheels out close to the fire and spin often till quite late, always saying that the wool “ran” so much smoother and better when all the doors were shut, and it was so warm and nice. Of course, the whirl of the spinning wheels would make us sleepy, and we children would soon be in bed. JCB

My sister Jane returned from teaching in Vermont and Connecticut in the Fall of 1848. To our surprise, she announced that she was to marry Richard Dunning Ryder of Weybridge, VT. In a few days, her old friend, Angelina Shepard, came to our house and helped about some necessary sewing but there was no time to prepare a wedding outfit, as Mr. Ryder was coming in his buggy, of course, before the fall rains spoiled good traveling. (There were no railroads near at that time.)

Mr. Ryder came and stayed with us two or three days, when they were married rather a late breakfast and started immediately on the return journey. We had but few guests. Jane’s girl friend Angelina Shepard, Mariette Smith and two or three of the neighbors with the minister were with us for breakfast and the ceremony was performed immediately after. The date was November 1, 1848. Sister (Jane) was married in a dress she had worn a little. I think the predominant color was light brown plaided with green and a little red with a good deal of lace in her neck and sleeves. I thought her a very sweet-looking bride. JCB

The summer I was eighteen years old, 1849, father tore down the old log home and built a new one on the same ground. He had been preparing the materials for two or three winters and built what he considered a good substantial farm house. We moved in late in the fall and it was bright and warm we thought it wonderfully pleasant. JCB.