



Bridget (Conway) Dundon - circa 1932

The next few years were apparently growth years on the farm. With the war over, the need for northern farm goods was a vital part of Reconstruction. James' foresight or simply good luck in locating on the Erie Railroad line and near the main road leading to Portageville must have put him in an excellent position from which to take advantage of the increasing trade in farm goods. He did so well in the years following the War that by 1875, when a prime piece of property consisting of 67.5 acres and advertised as "Spring Grove Farm" (also known as the Abraham King Estate) was placed on the market, he snatched it up for nearly \$7,000 cash, over \$100 an acre.

When compared with the \$16 per acre paid to Rial Botsford in 1856, it is clear to see that prosperous times had come to Genesee Falls.

The month after James purchased the King property, one of the most spectacular events ever to hit the Genesee Falls area occurred. In the early morning hours of May 6, 1875, the wooden high bridge of the Erie Railroad went up in a great fire. His property being on the Erie Railroad line, James and his family must have been provided a front row seat for this disaster. (Whether any of his property or buildings were damaged, we do not know at this time). By July 31 of the same year, a new iron bridge would take its place, one of the engineering achievements of its day.

After the purchase of the King property, there are no further records that we could find in the Wyoming County Courthouse regarding the affairs of James Conway until his Last Will and Testament was filed in Surrogates Court in April of 1886. Contained in the document is perhaps the best description of James and Elizabeth's achievements in Genesee Falls in the 33 years since they purchased the 1/4 acre from Nathaniel Gardner.

"To Jeremiah, as the first heir, I bequeath all that property east of the Erie Railway, formerly known as the King Property, containing 45 acres, (the deed states 67.5 acres) more or less, known as the homestead" (Homestead Farm was another name for the King property).

"To Patrick, all that tract or parcel of land... consisting of 28 acres, more or less"

"To James Jr., the first homestead, containing 27 acres, more or less"

Thus the property had grown to 100 acres, more or less by the time of his death.

James' will then goes on to divide all of his personal property among his three sons. Then it goes on to describe the richness of the land:

"the wheat, now on Patrick's land, to be divided in three equal shares (among) them. Moreover, the timber on the property belonging to my son, Jeremiah, to be divided into three equal shares. Also the use of all barns equally used (among) them."

Then, the apparent seeds of dissent were sown between the male and female heirs, as his will goes on to describe his legacy for the ladies of the family:

"To Bridget, ...the sum of \$20"

"To Kate, ...the sum of \$20"

"To Elizabeth, ...the sum of \$400"

The cash amounts were to be paid by the men of the family, 18 months after the death of their mother, in the event he should predecease her, which he did.

James Conway subsequently died on April 3, 1889, and was buried in Portageville. His will was probated in July of 1889, and sent to Surrogates Court on November 18, 1889. Shortly thereafter, on January 1, 1891, Patrick, going on with business as usual, gave his brothers, Jeremiah and James a mortgage on 115 acres, the entire farm. It appears at this time that Patrick sold his interest to his brothers in exchange for a \$1200 mortgage held by him. What role Patrick played afterward in the day to day affairs of the farm is unclear.

Meanwhile, Jerry Conway, by now one of Mr. Letchworth's foremen for his considerable holdings, was planting his roots deeper in

Genesee Falls. Shortly after he signed the mortgage for Patrick's share of the property, he borrowed \$430 from Mr. Letchworth, perhaps to pay for his share of the mortgage. He may have also borrowed the money to rebuild the barns, lost in a fire that had spread from the nearby railroad. In the same year his father died, Jerry wed Isabelle Gamble, Mary Ann Crozer's paid companion (Mary Ann Crozer was Mr. Letchworth's dear sister who lived with him in later years at Glen Iris). On April 1, 1890, Easter Sunday, a daughter, Marion, was born to Jerry and Isabelle. The birth took place in the Swiss Cottage (we are not sure if it was the Swiss Cottage at Lauterbrunnen or the one on the Prospect Home Farm which was later moved to the Council Grounds), as Jerry being the foreman in charge, was allowed to live there with his family. (Marion's daughter, Mary Bennett Moore, currently lives in Nunda and has an heirloom book, signed by Mary Ann Crozer, which had been a gift to Isabelle from Mary Ann.).



Swiss Cottage, W.P. Letchworth Estate. Spring 1890. On the porch holding young Marion Conway is her mother, Belle (Gamble) Conway.



Marion Conway (right) as a young girl with one of the Aunts who raised her.

Finally, the sisters, feeling disinherited and as yet uncompensated for even that amount which was owed them in the will, filed suit on March 25, 1891, contesting the validity of James Conway's will. They did this based on the fact that the will was signed on the face of the document, with more verbiage added after the signature on the face of the will. The case went to the New York Court of Appeals, where the will was overturned, and declared invalid.

In settlement of the will, each daughter received \$200 cash, to be paid by the sons on the day of the settlement. Apparently short of cash after legal fees, but property rich, the remaining sons, Jerry and James, took out a second mortgage of \$2500 held by Olive Bigelow of Genesee Falls. Out of the cash received from this mortgage they paid their obligation to their sisters, and the sisters all signed "quit claims" on the same day the brothers signed the mortgage to Olive Bigelow, July 17, 1891.

The 1890's were not as kind to the Conway sons as the late 1860's and early 1870's had been to their father. Their mother, Elizabeth, died in December 1894. Sometime prior to this, Jeremiah was widowed, left with the care of his infant son James William and his daughter Marion. Marion went to live with aunts in Nunda, and of James we have no record. In 1896, the worst summer in years for excess rainfall and excessively cool weather, coupled with what Mr. Letchworth called "the depressed condition of agricultural interests" must have taken its toll on the once prosperous farm. The court records tell of numerous judgements against Jeremiah, including the \$430 borrowed from Mr. Letchworth. On April 1, 1898, Olive Bigelow, possibly fearing she would never get her mortgage money from Jerry and James, assigned the mortgage to Mr. Letchworth for disposition. On April 22, 1898, Patrick Conway died, leaving only Jerry and James to weather the coming storm. Even though Patrick sold his interest years earlier, it is not known if the impending foreclosure had any ill effects on his health, or if his untimely death at the age of 36 years was an accident or coincidental. At any rate, the family farm was soon to be sold at auction, ending a success story repeated countless times by nameless immigrants the likes of James and Elizabeth Conway.

On May 2, 1898, a judgement of foreclosure and sale was passed on the Conway Farm. The brothers had amassed over \$5300 in unpaid debts, and on July 5, 1898, the farm was sold at an auction by Sheriff McFarland to the James Van Arsdales for the sum of \$4120.

In late September of the same year, the Van Arsdales sold the property to Mr. Letchworth for a slight profit of \$200 over what

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At least seventy years ago or more, it was the practice of certain farmers who had pen room and a quantity of feed to order a carload or more of lambs from western ranchers. These lambs would be penned and fed well until they were of proper size and weight to market. I would hesitate to state the average weight of each lamb upon arrival and the gain during the winter feeding.

I do remember faintly seeing a car load of lambs arrive at the local siding. I think that they had been unloaded and reloaded once at Chicago or somewhere that they might be fed and watered there. There was a stockage locally where they could be unloaded. Then with about four men and a dog, they were turned loose on the road and guided to the farm where they had to go. Such would be a difficult project with today's traffic.

I have been told that generally it was a profitable venture. I have also heard the remark that if you wanted a supply of nicotine, all one had to do was to give a certain farmer a package of chewing tobacco and then tell him that you had heard that the price of corn was going up and the price of lamb had gone down!

Another sheep farmer near Wyoming, William Fuest, butchered his lambs himself when they weighed around fifty pounds. He dressed them leaving in the heart and lungs, wrapped their bodies with paper and burlap, then put them on the morning passenger train, baggage coach. They would reach New York City that afternoon. It was a fairly profitable method by which to sell one's lambs if one liked the butchering process.

If I might, I would like to conclude this narrative on a personal note. My brother and I kept a flock of sheep of perhaps a hundred head and we found it one of the most interesting aspects of farm activities. Our sheep were mostly Corriedale. In order to develop larger lambs, we introduced a Suffolk ram to the flock. He certainly was a large animal but would only shear seven pounds of wool. He took life seriously, if you turned your back to him for a moment, he would lift you out of the pen.

The James Conway's of Genesee Falls:

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they had paid for it in July. Why Mr. Letchworth did not purchase it directly at the time of the auction is unknown. Perhaps, as the man the mortgage had been assigned to, he did not wish to directly foreclose on the homestead of his foreman, Jeremiah. Also, in 1898, Letchworth was embroiled in the battle to revoke the charter of the Commission that had obtained rights to build a hydro-power dam across the Genesee River. Whatever the reason, the rest, as they say, is history. Mr. Letchworth, after obtaining the Conway Farm, then set the property on the hillside above the Glen Iris to rest for 92 years, so my family and I could discover it all over again in October of 1990.

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