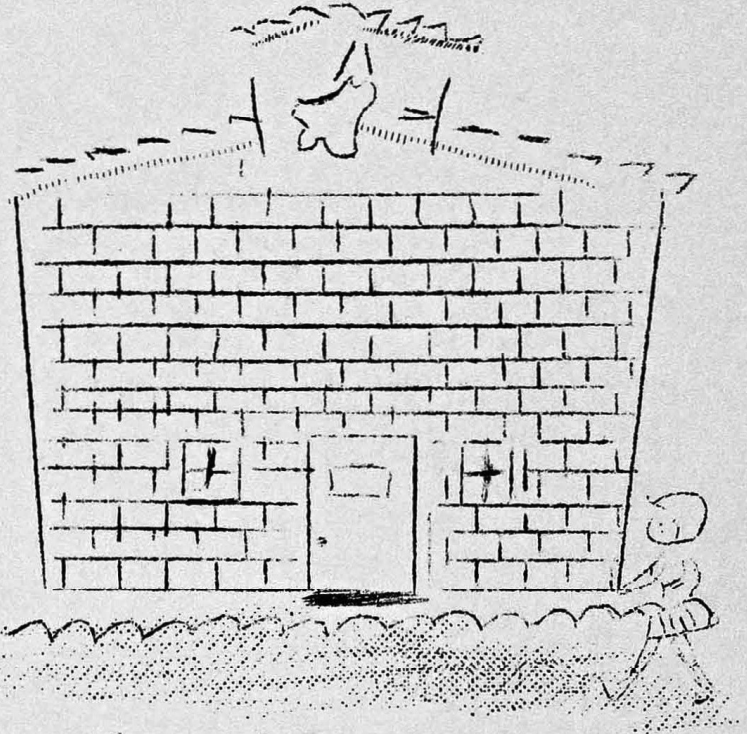


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### THE SMALLPOX DOCTOR

The following narrative was written by Dr. John A. Magee, a resident of Chestertown, Warren County, N.Y. In this short article he gives us a fleeting glimpse of episodes and experiences in the lives of a young doctor and his wife in the late eighteen hundreds.

Dr. John A. Magee, 1st, subject of the article, and father of the contributor, was born in 1856, the fifth child of Patrick and Mary (Bradley) Magee of the town of Thurman, Warren County, N.Y. and spent his childhood in that town. He was the third of the Magee sons to enter the medical profession. Dr. Hugh Magee, the eldest, practiced in Chestertown for many years. The second son to become a doctor was Dr. Daniel Magee, who spent much of his adult life in Lansingburg, N.Y. Dr. John Magee's medical education was obtained at Burlington, Vt., and at John Hopkins College of Medicine, Baltimore, Md.

Dr. John A. Magee, 2nd, writes: March 17, 1962. This blustery, snowy morning, I was in our cellar mixing some dirt and stuff to plant petunia seeds in to put up in the kitchen window, when I heard someone coming down the cellar stairs. I turned to see who it was. It was Daniel Patrick, our youngest grandson, about fourteen. "What are you doing, Gramp?", he wanted to know.

"Mixing some stuff to start seeds in," I told him. "my, what an old black pot," he said as he seated himself in an old rocking chair. "What's that rim around the bottom for?" "Dan," I said, "you wait until I get this mixture just right and in the window box, and I'll tell you a story about that old black iron pot just as your great grandmother told it to me."

### THE OLD BLACK POT

I was born and raised in old Lansingburg, at that time just a village, north of Troy. It was Saturday, just as it is today, when I came in our kitchen door and asked my mother a question about that same old black iron kettle. There was a real old country boiled dinner cooking in it that day. "Smells good, Mom," I said. "You use that heavy old black pot a lot, don't you?" "Yes, Johnny," she answered. "That pot helped your father and me get started out in life." "Your father was studying to be a doctor, down in Baltimore, Maryland. I had been teaching school in a lumber camp my father, Abe Wilcox, was running, over in the Sacandaga country. I remember I had nine pupils. Their folks worked for Dad, -the men in the woods and the women in the kitchen. Dad never had any trouble getting choppers, he always fed good. I taught school in a tent, with a chunk stove in it. It wasn't too cold as the tent was well banked.

It was about the last of May and we were out of the lumber camp, and home. We had finished, and the river drivers had taken over. Dad came home from town one day, and as he came toward the house he waved a letter at me. I knew at once who it was from. It was from your father.

Here is what it said, in part: "I have had a letter from Dr. Dan. He tells me of an epidemic of smallpox in Lansingburg, a village of 8,000, north of Troy, N.Y. The doctors around there are old, and it is a very good chance for a young doctor. I am to write to the Board of Health and tell them I would take a contract, -for one silver dollar a house call and including vaccination.



There were always outbreaks of smallpox while I was in Baltimore; I have been vaccinated, and have vaccinated others. I am not afraid of the disease.

Now, as soon as I get to Troy, I'll go up to Lansingburg, get my contract if they want me, and then borrow Dan's good road horse. I'll drive up to Chestertown. Then with your Dad's permission, we'll get married, and come back here the next day. you be ready. We can do it.

Well, Johnny, it all worked out as he planned it. He went to Troy, borrowed his brother's horse, and drove up to Lansingburg. He found a couple of members of the Board of Health and the contract was signed. 'One silver dollar a house call.'

He told them, "I must have two days more, I am going to drive to Chestertown to get married, but I'll be back on time.

Dan let him have some money and told him to go down to the nearest cigar store and buy a box of cigars, the best they have. When he came back, Dan told him, "you take my best horse and the top buggy. Grease the buggy and put the top down. Put the jack in the back. We'll get you off before daylight in the morning." John asked him, "What are the cigars for? The wedding?" Dan laughed. "No, he said. " I want you to drive to Waterford and get on the Champlain Canal towpath. It's level and easier on the horse. Later on in the morning when you meet a tow, hold up the cigars so the man on the tow horse can see them. He'll slow his team so the line will slacken. You drive over the towline, thank him and give him the cigars." It worked fine. He met a lot of tows.

He was past Schuylerville by mid-morning, so he went on until about 11 A.M. He had been walking the horse. When he saw a field with a brook, he drove in. He unhooked the horse, unharnessed him, and let him cool. Then he let him have a little water and fed him his oats. He had a sandwich for himself and drank a bottle of beer he had bought at a canal store. At the end of half an hour, he saw his horse was rested and cooled out, so he harnessed up again.

At Fort Edward, he left the canal and headed for Glen Falls. Here he drove to the Horseman's Hotel and told the owner what he wanted, -he wanted his horse properly cared for and rubbed down before he was fed. He had been driven a long ways. He gave the hotelman a dollar for the groom and said he would be back the next day. Then he left for Chestertown. The road wasn't as good as the towpath. Plenty of hills going north from Lake George. But he let the horse go easy on the upgrades and they made good time.

Johnny, when he got to Chestertown, he stopped at the minister's and told him, "Please hook up your horse and follow me to Abe Wilcox's. I want you to marry me to his daughter, Addie. Don't wait for supper. Bring your wife with you."

I was watching for him, and about dusk he drove into the yard. I ran out to meet him and got a big kiss and hug from my doctor. Your grandfather Wilcox came out and said, "You two go in and I'll cool the horse out. He sure looks like a good one."

About the time we got into the house, the minister and his wife arrived. The hired man tied the minister's horse out of the wind, blanketed him, and fed him some hay.

The lamps were lighted and we all went into the parlor, where we were married. Then we all signed the family Bible. Father had to have his fun with your father. "Dr. John Magee", he said, "you're the first Irishman to ever get into that Good Book". "Why, thank you, Father Abraham, "your father answered him right back.

Mother had chicken and biscuits on the table that night but what else I'll never know.

And now, Johnny, here's where the black iron pot comes into my story. We were chatting after the wedding. Mother spoke up, "Dr. John, how are you going to get the smallpox bugs off those big silver dollars? Addie, Abe just bought me this new pot with a rim on the bottom to set in the fire hole. This is my wedding present to you two. You have Dr. John empty the silver dollars into it when he brings them in, and you boil the tar out of them."

The next morning we were all up before peep o' day. Dad and the hired man tied my little trunk in the back and slid my telescope bag in beside it. We had said our goodbyes and were getting into the buggy when we heard a loud yell from the kitchen steps. It was Hannah, the hired girl. "Addie, you forgot your pot!" After it was stowed away, she told us she had packed a lunch in it for us to take on our long trip back. The horse was a good road horse. The early morning air was cold but I had a heavy coat and laprobe and didn't mind a bit.

It was turning light at Lake George. We made good time to Glen Falls and there we stopped again at the Horseman's Hotel. Your Dad paid his bill, bought another box of cigars, and we were off for Troy. He told me, "Mrs. Magee, it's your job now to give the canalers the cigars". At noon, we stopped in a nice field and fed and watered the horse. We ate Hannah's lunch.

I interrupted Mom to ask, "How did you meet Dad?"

"That's easy to answer", she answered. "I boxtrapped him." And she went on to explain, "There was a box social at the Methodist Church in Chestertown one evening. Girls were to bring lunches for two, usually in a shoe box; boys could eat supper with the girl whose box they bought. Your father saw me and my box and he bid high for it.

He was working with his brother, Dr. Hugh Magee, at that time, and came to the social to meet some young people;

"Well, Johnny, the rest of the trip was easy. We got to Dr. Dan's before supper time. After supper, Dan told us, "I've done a couple of things for you. I've located a small boarding house in the middle of Lansingburg. A man and wife run it. He's a soldier and has had smallpox. You vaccinate her and the two schoolteachers boarding there, and Addie, all at the same time. I've got the vaccine for you to start; and I've had 500 smallpox cards printed for you."

All your father could say was, "Dan, how can I ever thank you?"

I told Dr. Dan about boiling the money in our iron pot. He said, "That's the ticket!"



"John, " Dr. Dan went on, "every night you scrub up and change your clothes after you empty the dollars into the pot. And, -walk in the middle of the road, too."

House to house he walked and vaccinated. My, how the dollars rolled in! Soon, I had 200 wrapped in a little sack I ran up on Mrs. Weaver's sewing machine. John walked to the bank one day with the sack and stood outside and yelled. "I'm Dr. Magee. Some one come out!" The clerk came out and your father introduced himself and said, "I want to open a joint account for John and Addie S. Magee." He came right back with the bankbook. "From now on, Mrs. Magee, you do the walking to the bank."

A month or so of all that walking began to tire him, even though he was a good strong country boy. There was a good barn in back of the boarding house, so he nosed around and bought a horse and buggy. He had to have a man to take care of the horse, and to help with the driving. He remembered a young Irishman in a laborer's hotel where he had gone to vaccinate the inmates. The young man had already had the disease, so John looked him up. That's how Jimmy McBride came to work for Dr. John. Lots of nights, your father would bring him home for a late supper. He'd get him to talk about the green fields of Ireland.

Late that summer he had the smallpox beaten. One day Jimmy said to him, "Doctor, you don't need me any more. You have more time now and can take care of the horse; and Mrs. Magee can go with you. She loves to ride."

"Well, what are your plans, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Oh, I've got a chance to learn the bricklaying trade. By the way, Doctor, I've always wondered, how did you get such big hands?" Your Dad laughed at that. "Chopping trees. By the time you've got your time in at the bricklaying trade yours will be big, too!"

So he encouraged Jimmy to learn the mason's trade and things turned out well in the end. In later years Jimmy became a contractor. One day, a short time after Jimmy left us, he made us a visit. "I've got to tell you what I'm doing now," he said. "They are paying good money on the coal docks, -fifty cents an hour shoveling coal into buckets; horses pull them off the boats. A month of that and I'll have a stake to see me through the winter. Maybe a few odd jobs, too. Then in the spring I'll start at the bricklaying."

We finally rented a house in Lansingburg. Your father had his office there for years. Of course there was a good barn with it.

#### THE CIRCLE CLOSES

Many years later, back here in Chestertown, a hardwood veneer plant began operations. Our son, Johnny, was selling logs to the plant. One day, he drove into the yard with a load of logs. He noticed a well-dressed man talking to a couple of masons outside the boiler room. A further look, and he thought he had him placed. And so had the well-dressed man placed Johnny. "Shut that thing off and get down here," he called. Johnny laughed and got down.

"You're Jimmy McBride!"

"Yes, sir! Now shake the hand that shook the hand of your good grandfather fifty years ago!" He said later to us, "The doctor set me going in the right direction alright. He told me to stick to the mason's trade and I've never been sorry. I've retired, but I got tired of laying around, so here I am now, relining boilers."



JOHN THURMAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

As noted in the June 1968 Quarterly, we are giving the program for coming meetings of JTHS, Inc. for 1968-1969 in each issue of the publication, as well as in local newspapers. A few details are lacking in the following schedule, but we expect to have them for the December Quarterly.

1968	PROGRAM	1969
Saturday, September 21, 1963	The first "Get-Together" of the local Historical Societies (Chestertown, Glens Falls, Lake George, Minerva, and Thurman) Shore line cruise on Lake George Shaw's Boat Dock, Beach Road, Lake George 10:30 A. M. (Note: Regular date was Sept. 13. The committee felt an off-season date would mean less crowded conditions, a more leisurely and longer cruise, and hopefully, more beautiful fall foliage.) Tour of Fort William Henry Restoration after cruise.	
Friday, November 8, 1968	Larry Older, Middle Grove, N.Y. Return engagement "Last of the Adirondack Minstrels" Folk Songs, Guitar, Fiddle Turkey Supper 5:30 P. M. Thurman Town Hall, Athol, N. Y.	
Friday, January 10, 1969	Stewart Farrar, Warrensburg, N. Y. More Reminiscences of Old Warrensburg with slides of Old W'burg Short business meeting Music Refreshments Albert Emerson Memorial Town Hall Warrensburg, N. Y. 8 o'clock	
Friday, March 14, 1969	Mrs. Philip H. Roberts, Warrensburg, N. Y. "Care of Your Antiques" Short Business Meeting Refreshments Albert Emerson Memorial Town Hall Warrensburg, N. Y. 8 o'clock	
Friday, May 9, 1969	"Old Neighbor Night" Folk Singer Slides Refreshments Annual Business Meeting Thurman Town Hall, Athol, N. Y. 8 o'clock	
Friday, June 13, 1969	Program to be announced Business meeting Thurman, Town Hall, Athol, N.Y.	

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SIX MILES SQUARE

Did you know that there have been at least two hamlets which have been named for members of the Griffing (Griffin) family, who were early settlers in the lower eastern Adirondacks? One of these hamlets was Griffin's Station (now Thurman Station) in Warren County; the other was Griffin in Hamilton County.

Stephen Griffing was the first to settle at present Thurman Station. We find "under Thurman", in the 1963 "History of Warren County, New York" that "Stephen Griffing, a veteran of the Revolution came in 1800 and settled opposite the present river bridge. The house with later additions is still standing" Many of Stephen Griffing's thrilling adventures during the Revolution are related in the book, "Stephen Griffing-His Ancestors and Descendants" as compiled



by Edith Willoughby West at the request of the descendents of Stephen Griffing.

It is entirely possible that some official of the Adirondack Branch of the Delaware and Hudson Railroad, which was being constructed northward in the late 1860's, named Griffin's Station after Stephen Griffing; or some other member of the Griffin Family. Interesting statistics in Asher and Adams "New Topographical Atlas and Gazetteer of New York State" of 1870 gives the distance of Athol P. O. from Griffing's Station as two miles; Warrensburg, three miles; Thurman, eight miles; The Glen, eight and a half miles; Chester, twelve miles; Johnsbury, fifteen miles; North River, twenty-three miles, Olmsteadville, twenty-three and three-quarter miles; Minerva, twenty-six and a quarter miles; Indian Lake, thirty-seven miles, Newcomb, forty-four miles; and Long Lake, sixty miles; Pottersville, seventeen and a half miles; and North Creek, eighteen miles!

Stephen Griffin, 2nd, a grandson of Stephen Griffing, was born in Warrensburg, October 18, 1812, and died there, December 31, 1893. He became one of the best-known lumbermen and tannery owners of the late 19th century in the lower Adirondacks. In 1886, Mr. Griffin began lumbering in the Town of Newcomb, Essex County, and his operations there were not concluded until he had cut the timber from a tract of land about "six miles square".

We do not know where Stephen Griffin 2nd, lumbered in the Town of Newcomb, but there is a tradition that a man named Griffin straightened out the channel in the Goodenow River so as to make it more navigable for log-driving. This is in the same area where the dammed-up waters of Goodenow Flow presently cover a large acreage.

We do know that Washington Chase of Newcomb was an agent of Mr. Griffin during his lumbering operations in Newcomb town. We also know that in the 1870 census of Newcomb, Stephen Griffin, 2nd, is listed as being a 58 year old farmer, worth \$3,000 in real estate, and \$2,000 in personal property.

After selling out his lands in the Town of Newcomb, Mr. Griffin purchased about 43,000 acres in the Town of Johnsbury, Warren County, and the Town of Wells, Hamilton County. In 1877, he erected a tannery in the southwest part of Johnsbury, which became known as the "Oregon Tannery"; and in 1880 another in the northeast corner of Wells. The growing settlement where the second tannery was erected was earlier called Moon's Mills, and then for a time Extract now became known as Griffin in honor of the new tannery owner. Griffin soon had a population of about 300 people. At the present time there are very few people living there, and there are probably not more than half a dozen houses.

Another descendant of Stephen Griffing, who resided at Newcomb during the late 19th century was Frederick Cameron, son of David M. and Eliza Cameron. He married Miss Lulu Gillingham, daughter of John K. and Delina Gillingham of Thurman. Mr. Cameron was a Methodist Episcopal minister for many years, and served a year at Newcomb in the mid-1870's. Although the Newcomb Methodist Episcopal Church had recently been erected, there was still no parsonage, and this meant that Mr. Cameron had to look elsewhere for housing. This was soon found, and the Rev. Cameron family moved into an apartment over the general store and postoffice conducted by James O. Braley on Pine Hill in Newcomb. The store and postoffice building have since been destroyed. The James



O. Braley's also operated the Braley of Central House (now the present residence of Mrs. Mildred Anderson) for the accommodation of travellers a few feet west of the store and postoffice.

John Steele Griffin, born on September 27, 1850 and died on October 21, 1910 was still another descendant of Stephen Griffing, who resided at Newcomb during the late 19th century. He married Miss Etta J. Parker, daughter of Zenas and Rachel Dornburgh Parker, on October 20, 1886 at Newcomb. Their children were: James J., Lee Elbert, Frank H., Nestor C., Carrie E. and Helen E., who are all now deceased.

John S. Griffin's occupations are reported to have been timber cruiser, surveyer's assistant, and mountain guide. It is said that the Griffin's first home was a small house in the western section of Newcomb near where the waters of Griffin's Rapids (formerly Belden's Rapids) flow into the head of Lake Julia.

There are still those who remember when the smallpox was raging in the Griffin home, that Town Constable Noah Lacasse would sit or stand under a big maple tree in front of the house and warn people to keep their distance. There is little doubt that the Constable aided the Griffin family to the best of his ability, and saw that they were kept amply supplied with food and medicine.

After the smallpox epidemic had subsided, the Newcomb Town Board of Health ordered the Griffin home destroyed. A larger house was then erected near the site of the old one. This also has been destroyed in recent years,

Lee and Nestor Griffin operated the Griffin Brothers Store in the former Dillon and Shaughnessy General Store (now the Schoolhouse Apartments) for a short time in the early 1920's. Lee Griffin operated several lumber jobs, held several town offices, and was with the State Conservation Department for sixteen years. Nestor Griffin operated a shingle mill, served as a town officer, and was in the Seabees in the Pacific area during World War II. After the war, he constructed a dam on a brook sometimes called Chase's or Grandpa's Brook on the former Zenas Parker farm near the eastern foot of Goodenow Mountain. The pond thus created is locally called Griffin's Pond.

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(Note--I have been aided in my search for material for this article by Mrs. Maude Chase Rice, Mrs. Iva Braley Rist, Grover Lynch, and the late Abner Parker of Newcomb, and by Hugh A. Pasco of Newcomb and Thurman. Also of great assistance has been "History of Hamilton County" by Ted Aber and Stella King (1965).

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By Leslie Rist