

**In Loving  
Remembrance**

BY

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GRANDMA COOMBS

## PREFACE.

If my attempt to bring before the public the many beautiful traits that my late grandmother possessed be passed by unnoticed, it is because of my inability to show to you, through the pen, her life as it was. Hers was a strong Christian character. Lived out every day. Forgetful of self, she lived always for others, never shrinking when duty called, and unflinching in danger. Her descendants are scattered broadcast. Who can say that the Eastern Townships is not the better for her having lived in them?

E. A. C., age 15.

## IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE.

It was in the Spring of eighteen thirty-six that a sailing vessel reached the harbor of Quebec, after a voyage of seven weeks across the Atlantic. Among its passengers was Caroline Parsons, a slight girlish figure of about seventeen. She had come with her parents and three brothers to settle in the Canadian woodlands, which they had heard so much about.

After a short stay at Quebec, they proceeded on their way to Sherbrooke. At that time the only accommodation the country provided for the emigration parties was to travel in covered carts, which were used to carry products between Quebec, Three Rivers and Sherbrooke. The rate charged for travel was one dollar per hundred weight for so many miles.

Again, as in the ocean voyage, each party provided his or her own food, which was procured at small settlements through which they passed, or where they changed horses, and at other times when going up the long grades, and the horses had to rest, Caroline would try at some of the houses that they



passed to obtain some extra dainty for her mother, who not being strong, found the journey very tiresome, after being used to a comfortable home in England. The dainties were no more than a warm slapjack or a piece of barley bread. Then she would have to hurry to catch up again with the carts.

When Sherbrooke (which was then a very small place) was reached, they looked around a few days, and finally decided to take up a homestead in Bury, as the Government was selling land there on easy terms.

Caroline and her mother remained in Sherbrooke while the father and brothers went to select their land, and to build a log cabin. They sawed down the trees and the cabin was raised by putting one log upon another, which was later packed firmly with moss. The only way to obtain boards for the roof and doors, was by digging a trench in the ground large enough for a man to work in. A huge log was placed over this, being held up at one end by a smaller log, with one man in the trench, and one man on top of the log, and with a pitsaw they cut it into boards.

Beds, tables and chairs were, also, made of sawn logs and handcut boards. A fireplace was made by digging a hole in the floor, then

building it around firmly with stones fashioned like a blacksmith's forge, and with a chimney also of stone. This fireplace served the family for both stove and furnace.

The father and sons worked hard, both early and late. They were strong, sturdy men, the brothers being much older than Caroline, but it was late in July before they were ready for the mother and sister.

It was while staying in Sherbrooke that Caroline became acquainted with John Coombs, a young man learning the carpenter's trade, who had come from England about three years before. The acquaintance soon ripened into friendship. He lost no opportunity to be of assistance to Caroline and her mother, and when they left for Bury, it was with the understanding that he was to visit Caroline in her new home.

The journey to Bury was made by Government wagons, which went every month to carry supplies to the families that were settled on homesteads. For the first summer and winter a bag of flour and half a fat sheep were left at each home.

The land was sold in one hundred acre lots, for one hundred dollars, to be paid in three yearly payments, after the first year.

Mr. Parsons had the means to pay the price down, but the kind-hearted agent advised him to keep what money he had, and it was well he did, for the family were in sore straits before they could make their living in any way out of the farm. The first summer all they could raise was a few potatoes for their own use.

The place was mostly thick woods, as there was no sale for wood at that time, and the land had to be cleared. The trees were cut down and the logs were used for two purposes. Huge piles were made and burned into ashes which were then leached. The lye was then boiled a long time in a large iron kettle, till salts were made out of it. This they bagged and carried many miles on their backs, and sold to a small company who shipped it away to be made into potash of salts and soda. Other piles of logs were covered thickly with dirt, and then set on fire. The men watched, keeping it smothered with earth. When all burnt a sort of soft coal was produced which was used by blacksmiths. Winter, with its deep snow, put a stop to these operations except the cutting down of the trees, but they prepared in the long evenings for Spring by making wooden buckets and troughs, also wooden snow-

shoes, so as to be ready for making maple sugar when the sap commenced running.

John Coombs' visits through the winter had been as frequent as distance would allow; and in the Spring while the father and sons were clearing up lands and putting in what crops they could of wheat, buckwheat, barley and potatoes, Caroline and her mother were preparing for a June wedding. But the preparation brought up sad thoughts intermingled with the happy ones, especially to the mother.

Two years before an elder sister was also preparing for her marriage. Her friends had given a party in honor of the occasion, and the sister had been so happy and gay, but she had failed to be cautious, and the consequence had been that after a few days serious illness, the bridal robes were hastily laid aside and the burial robes were needed instead. But Caroline was too lighthearted to let her mother's thoughts linger too long on sad memories.

Let us go in imagination to that cabin home on the morning of Caroline's wedding day. I am sure you would agree with me that she was a very pretty and happy bride, dressed in her plain though neat garments. A bridal veil and long train was not once thought of and as for white slippers, a strong pair of boots were

more to the purpose, for the nine-mile walk that she had to take over the new made roads to the nearest church at Cookshire, where she was being waited for by John, who had taken his sixteen-mile walk from Sherbrooke earlier in the day. Then came the sweet and solemn ceremony, "Till death do us part." As the wedding vows were uttered before God's altar, so were they lived out in the sixty-nine years that they were permitted to be together.

Caroline could not be persuaded to take lunch at the tavern before starting on the home walk, but she had often been heard to say that the only wedding cake she had was a piece of dry barley cake that she begged from a distant neighbor before she got home, and that it tasted as good to them as any of the wedding cakes now-a-days.

John had still two years' time to put in at his trade, so the first year of their married life was spent in Sherbrooke, and many amusing anecdotes have they related of the ways and means they took to furnish their two-roomed home.

The next April we find Caroline returning from a walk when a thoughtless neighbor met her with the startling news that John had fallen from a roof and was nearly killed, and a

few minutes later two men brought him home on a hastily made stretcher, looking to all appearance in a very critical condition. The doctor who was soon on the spot found many broken bones but no internal injuries, so in time a complete recovery was hoped for.

Before morning a frail little mite of a daughter, weighing only three pounds, came to claim the attention of them both. It seemed incredulous to the kind-hearted friends that came with offerings to help in every way, when the doctor had said it was possible to raise the child, but it was soon apparent that she had come to stay, and the little midget of that time has been a grandmother now these thirty years.

When John was able to be moved they spent the time of convalescence at Bury. When he was ready to return to his work again, Caroline's mother was in such poor health it was impossible for the daughter to leave her till the following April. Then being anxious to rejoin her husband, she walked the distance of 25 miles, carrying her year-old baby, the roads at that time of the year being unfit even for travel by heavy teams.

The stay in Sherbrooke was short for the cold weather came again, Mrs. Parsons (Car-



oline's mother) relapsed again into sickness, and it was soon evident that she was in the grasp of an incurable disease.

The brothers by this time were in homes of their own, so to indulge the wishes of the mother, John and Caroline gave up their little home in Sherbrooke and settled on the farm, where they stayed for five years.

John went to work with a will to help clear up the farm. While working one day with the oxen, he broke one of the bows of the ox yoke. Leaving the animals he went in search of a piece of wood that would bend easily, to repair the yoke. Intent on his purpose he lost his bearing and it was the third day before he got out of the thick woods. Then he was a number of miles away from home. He had lived on bark and berries and his clothes were in tatters. His wife's feelings can better be imagined than described. She had collected together a search party to hunt for him. Needless to say that all hands rejoiced to see him reach home safely.

It would take a long story to record the happenings of those years, the meagre living, the constant denying themselves of bare necessities for the sake of the invalid who had no idea of the privations that were endured

for the sake of gratifying her wishes. One Spring the provisions got so low, I have heard them say, that they dug out the seed potatoes to eat after they were planted.

All that love and labor could do was done for the comfort of the invalid. For nearly two years she had to be lifted in and out of her bed. The long term of nursing and anxiety was a great strain on Caroline's health, and when her mother was laid in the last resting place, there were two tiny little graves there first, and just before leaving Bury, a little son born nearly four years before, had to be left behind with the others, having died after only two days' sickness. This last loss left a deeper wound in the young mother's heart, for up to the time of her death, her eyes would fill with tears when speaking about the loss of their first little son.

After this time Caroline's father went to live with one of his married sons, while she with her husband and daughter moved again to Sherbrooke, where John worked at his trade and helped build a number of the prominent houses of that time.

Money was scarcer then than now, and he had to take most of his wages in trade, such as groceries, dry goods, lumber, etc.

At one time he drew only twenty-five cents in cash for three months' work, but he had a good help-mate, who assisted him in many ways, and with strict economy, and an unlimited supply of perseverance, they succeeded in purchasing two building lots.

They built a home for themselves, which is still standing on Montreal Street, and had a second house partly erected when they exchanged their property in Sherbrooke for a piece of land four miles away, up the Magog River. And again pulling up stakes in the Spring of 1854, they moved on the farm, with their family of five children, two sons and two daughters being born during the ten years they had lived in Sherbrooke. It was two years before they left, that the first railway train ran into Sherbrooke, and crowds gathered from far and near to see the sight.

But we will follow Caroline as she travels over more rough roads to their farm home and our sympathies are with her when they arrived at the rude structure that will hardly shelter them from the wind and rain. But she was not easily discouraged, and helped again in every possible way, clearing up land and planting potatoes. It was uphill work for a long time, building up again a new home. For

the first winter they lived in the cellar, and the house was completed little by little as fast as their means and time would allow. There was no need of hand-cut boards at this period (though home-made wooden spikes and nails were used wherever possible). The logs could either be sold or exchanged for timber, by drawing them to the river bank where a saw mill company bought them and floated them down the river. The winter months were spent in this occupation, while the land was cultivated and improved in the open seasons. And for the success that they finally made out of farming, credit was just as much due to our heroine for her persistent energy, encouragement and work as far as her strength would permit, as the harder tasks which John performed with his manly strength and vigor.

Before we bid adieu to our friends in 1875; let us again visit them in imagination. There are five more of their family to be introduced, the youngest a bright looking lad of ten years. The eldest son, John, now in his 28th year, had taken his place in the ranks when the Fenians had tried to raid Canada in 1866, answering his country's call for help, as his father had done at the time of the Rebellion in 1837. He now with three others of the fam-



ily, was married and all settled in nearby homes of their own.

Caroline was not only a mother and a grandmother, but already a great-grandmother to a little two-year old girl. She was a woman that was known, loved and respected by rich and poor, and was called on to attend sick cases of all descriptions, always answering the summons, be it night or day, and both French and English for miles around will resound with me her praises and join in, with good wishes of success in my effort to keep ever green the memory of Caroline Coombs.

E. A. C.