

Part 1

THE SIMMONS FAMILY of Westfield Township,  
Medina Co., Ohio

The first Simmons that came to Westfield Twp. were Jonathan, Jr. and wife, Abigail; also, his brother, Isaiah, who never married. With them was their cousin, Calvin Phillip, and wife, Sallie Briggs. The year was 1820. They took up their land west of Chippewa Lake in Jas. Fowler's tract.

Between 1820 and 1832 Jonathan, Jr. had persuaded his family to join him in Ohio. They were all located in Ontario Co., N.Y. near Bristol Center. There was Ruth and Orrin Allen, Lucy and Jas. Gooding, who only stopped here and then went on to Goodings Grove near Chicago in 1832, Simpson and Sally Austin, Harriet and Ebenezer Bissell, Sally and Isaac Jones, Elmina (who married Samuel Hastings Pomeroy after coming to Ohio), then Erastus, who did not marry until he was 36 years old to Eliza Daniels in 1850, besides Jonathan, Jr. and Isaiah. His father and mother came in 1832, who we will remember as bringing with them the old double seat or wagon rocker in possession of Orello Simmons Buckner - then the peacocks that the older members of the family used to tell us about. They must have loved the beautiful colors, or maybe just the proud bird.

Jonathan, Sr. and Ruth Gooding Simmons took up Fowlers land south of Chippewa Lake on the highest knoll overlooking the Lake on the west end east road. Always a slogan of the family was - build

on a knoll.

The first death in this group was Orrin Allen, husband of Ruth, their oldest daughter, and is buried in old cemetery at Friendsville, Ohio, in Westfield Twp.

Jonathan and Ruth's first home was a double log cabin. They planted grape vines and the old hop vine they brought with them. I have stopped at the old well and have heard my father and others tell of grandfather and his keen mind - grandmother and her kindly ways - stories passed on from father to son.

Among the stories was how Grandmother Ruth blew the old sea-shell and they could all hear it and knew that she wished them to gather the next day for a family dinner or gathering. This shows that all took up their farms surrounding the double log cabin. There was a close family relationship between all at the corners. Differences they must have had but I feel that they were followed by a laugh.

I remember stories of how Jonathan got the best of the bargain - there was much trading. Then, the sarcasm of Uncle Simpson, who, by the way, was a kindly man.

There was very little money involved in the buying of land. They paid for this land as they accumulated small sums for their labor. I would say in the case of Jonathan, Jr., he may have added some to his earnings by consul to his neighbors and by performing many early marriages. He was one of the early justices of peace of

the north section of Westfield Twp. In those times the justice of peace was very important to the settlers.

There was the usual pioneer living that we have read about. The men hunted and fished in the winter to supply food. In this family I am sure they had salted codfish, a liking they had brought from their home Deighton, Mass. to Bristol Hills and then to Ohio. The women made clothes and bread (witch yeast bread). They made cheese, good old Yankee cheese; the wheels were still in the cellar when was I a child.

Along about the years 1840 to 1850 the log cabin was being torn down and many of these settlers were building story and one-half New England homes. The women were talking of the quilts to make for the spare room. I have one made by Harriett Bissell about that time. All made the same pattern in this family; I have seen three others.

The men were talking about their homes and they felt the need for insurance in case of fire on their homes.

About this time, we will say 1846 or 1847, Jonathan Simmons, Jr. and others drove flocks of sheep to Watertown, N.Y. While they were there he heard about mutual fire insurance protection. He came home fired with the idea. There was much talk - gatherings of friends on the LaFayette-Lodi road as well as the LeRoy-LaFayette Road. The LaFayette-Lodi road is a diagonal road and not far from the neighbors on the other road. Those relatives and those friends,

besides Asa Farnum, a close friend at LeRoy, also George Collier, who had joined one of these first talks (so I was told by his daughter, Emeline) - each one may have known a man they felt could advise. The story goes that at the Asa Farnum's village store in LeRoy they met - Jonathan Simmons, George Collier, Selah Beach, B. D. Austin, Luther King, Asa Farnum, J. O. Simmons, Earl Moulton, Henry Chapin, Isaiah Phillips, Isaac Jones, Timothy Burr, Amos Sheldon, Isaac Rogers, John B. Chase. These men were relatives or intermarried or had known each other in their youth in Connecticut or Massachusetts. Also, nine of these men were Universalists. They all were talking of their church - the Universalist Church - and so LeRoy was chosen as the place for this adventure. (See Page 605 of Medina Co., Ohio History of 1881.)

There was much legislation to insure their right to go ahead with insurance in that day. These men provided that the home office should always be in LeRoy. They received the charter on the 8th day of February, 1848. Ohio Farmers began issuing policies July 8, 1848. The first annual report is dated Sept. 5, 1849.

I have before me the first annual report of the Ohio Farmers Insurance Co. The first elected board of directors were Jonathan Simmons, President, George Collier, Asa Farnum, Isaiah Phillips, Isaac Rogers, Isaac Jones, and Calvin Chapin. The first Secretary was B. D. Austin.

Jonathan, Jr. served as president until 1852, Abigail, his

wife, died Feb. 17, 1846 - age 46 yrs. 11 mo. 16 days (tombstone record) - buried in Friendsville, Ohio. Jonathan, Jr. and his wife Abigail had two children, Jonathan Oscar and Laura Ann. Jonathan Oscar was born Jan. 12, 1821 in Westfield Twp., Medina Co., Ohio. He started his business career in LaFayette Center where he had a prosperous mercantile store and also, at the same time, he had an ashery. He was one of the original men who organized the Ohio Farmers Insurance Company and was their special agent for a few years. In later life, after he had gone to Little Falls, Minn., he went to Louisiana for some time but came back to Little Falls and practiced medicine. He was known as a kindly doctor of Little Falls, Minn. He died in January, 1890, and is buried in Little Fall, Minn.

Laura Ann - do not know the year she was born - was a beautiful girl; she had two suitors, Uriah Beach and Frederick Bradley Chamberlain, who were both members of the Universalist Church. She finally married Uriah Beach in 1847 and to them was born Abbie Beach. Uriah Beach soon died and is buried beside Abigail Simmons, his mother-in-law. Laura Ann was again courted by Frederick B. Chamberlain. They were married and went to St. Louis, Mo. to live. They had one son, Frederick Bradley.

In the year 1862-1863 Jonathan, Jr. made a trip to Ohio. He visited all his brothers and sisters. In April he was urged by his daughter-in-law, Harriet, to come back to Minnesota as they needed

him as J. O. was having to spend much time away from Little Falls. Jonathan, Jr. went by way of St. Louis; he visited Laura Ann. He contracted a severe cold while on the way. It became much worse, so J. O. wrote in detail of his sickness. Death came to him April 23, 1863. So ended the life of the alert, persuasive, and energetic pioneer who was born in or near Deighton, Mass. March 24, 1796, went to Bristol Center, Ontario Co., N. Y. with his parents, probably in 1799, then to Ohio, and on to Little Falls, Minn. in 1857 - one hundred years ago.

This written by Ruth Simmons Stebbins

Creston, Ohio -1957

Children of J. O. Simmons and Harriet H. Lee were:

Mary Jane, born Feb. 3, 1848, in Westfield Twp., Medina Co., Ohio; married March 25, 1868, to Alfred Tanner of Little Falls, Minn.

Henry - died 1864 - buried in Little Falls.

Jonathan Oscar, born March 29, 1851, in Westfield Twp., Medina Co., Ohio.

Frank Bradley, born in Little Falls, Minn. Jan. 18, 1859; died in Portland, Oregon.

Charles Gay, born ? , died Nov. 16, 1947.

William Lee, born ? , died 1918.

Part 2

Jonathan and Ruth's old tin trunk, kept by his son,  
Erastus, then Edwin (Edward) and now Ruth  
Simmons Stebbins - and their life in Westfield Twp.

A tin trunk was in many a pioneer home. This one seems to hold so many mementos of their lives it is hard to decide what will be of interest now.

Jonathan, Sr. saved his old commissions in the Ontario Co., New York militia as lieutenant and then captain, dated 1802 and 1804, both signed by Geo. Clinton as Governor of New York State.

Among many deeds is the one to their home in Bristol Center - this and land transfers of other property. When they came to Bristol they evidently borrowed money from the State of Connecticut.

Ruth had received a letter from a Gooding, who had been to England and visited the Gooding home there, copied wills, and told of a Geo. Gooding coming to New England. This is just one sheet of the letter.

The first deed, Lot 23, in Westfield Twp., is transferred from Jonathan, Jr. and Abigail to Jonathan, Sr. and Ruth in 1832. This was for the corner fifty acres. This is the corner of present County Roads 78 and 15. I find a transfer of this land and also Lot 26 to Erastus Simmons, their youngest son, in year 1838 for sum of one thousand and five hundred dollars.

There is an added signed agreement by Erastus to take care of his father and mother during the rest of their lives. Erastus, with the

help of his bachelor brother Isaiah and their housekeeper Phoebe Smith, gave to both of them loving care. I want to add that Phoebe had a snug little two-room home built for her after the marriage of Erastus.

During this time Erastus added quite a few properties in his own name. In 1858 Erastus bought a piece of property: the deed has the signatures of Jonathan, Jr., J. O. his son -- Erastus and John Jones.

All of these deeds are in long hand. Those that Jas. Fowler sold from his tract are in printed form, if they were a direct transfer.

Jonathan, Sr. born 1-31-1768 in Bristol Co., Mass. near Deighton; died 5-19-1845 Medina Co., Ohio.

Ruth Gooding - born 2-20-1769 Bristol Co., Mass.  
died 3-20-1859 Medina Co., Ohio

Both buried in Friendsville Cemetery, Medina Co., Ohio.

Erastus was a prosperous farmer. I find he was a licensed cattle broker - later elected Justice of Peace for Westfield in 1870. This commission is signed by Rutherford B. Hayes, then Governor of Ohio.

These farmers around Chippewa Lake had many ditch problems. There are receipts from commissioners that Erastus had paid his assessment.

A Farmers' Almanac of 1857 had stayed in the trunk a hundred years. That's the year Jonathan, Jr. and his son, J. O. went to Little Falls, Minn.

In June, 1850, Erastus married Eliza Daniels, daughter of Frederick Daniels and Sally Bigelow, who had moved into LeRoy in 1849. They, too, were Universalists. Sally Bigelow's father was Rev. Timothy Bigelow, a pioneer Universalist minister, establishing several churches.

Between 1851 and 1867 nine children were born in the new home that Erastus built for his wife Eliza. In 1957 people by name of Simmerman live there.

Children's names: Caroline F., Evalyn Urania, Anice (died young), Harriet Eliza and Maryette (twins) - Maryette died - George E., Isaiah E., Edward or (Edwin) O., Lillian May.

This was a friendly home. They had many visitors; besides, in that time there were peddlers that came down from Cleveland with their packs. I remember stories of old man Martin and Sampson.

The letters here in the trunk reveal some of the topics talked about. Religious beliefs were discussed. One book they read was Hosea Ballou's sermons. They were interested in politics of the times. The new colleges, Lombard University in Galesburg, Ill. and Bucktell College, now Akron University, were given seventy-five dollar endowments.

Then I find pamphlets of debates of Douglas and of Thurman and others. Also an old newspaper of Ontario Co., N.Y. of Canadaiqua dated August 19, 1823.

In year 1873 Erastus and Eliza felt the children should have the

benefit of the LeRoy schools so we find a deed, buying a home of Amos G. and Sarah Hawley, which is the home back of new Ohio Farmers Insurance Office, part of Lot 28.

There they lived for several years. Lost to most of us are those years. I know my father was a small boy who gave Belvedeer Boise a teaspoon of a new kind of cabbage, which was horseradish. Belvedeer often told me this.

The older girls, Eva, Caroline, and Hattie, were courted and married - Merrit Jones, Jas. Wilson Martin, and Sam'l Burkholder, respectively. These were the years after the Civil War.

The chest doesn't tell when they moved back to the farm. I feel it could be when the boys George, Ide [Isaiah], and Ed were old enough to take up the farm.

After school at LeRoy, Ide and Lillian May went to Bucktell College. There are several receipts for their rooms.

Before 1890 Erastus was Postmaster in LeRoy and Isaiah was Deputy. In the year 1891 Erastus was well satisfied with the way his son, Ed, was getting ahead with his farming. An account sheet is in the trunk. You should be told here that Ed married Kate Louise Hunt on 2-16-1888 and all were living in the old home.

Ide was ready to come back to farming. Ide had married Minnie A. Carpenter of Olmstead Falls, Ohio 9-22-1886. While Isaiah was living in LeRoy there was born Marie E., Lucille W., and Harriet A. Their daughter, Georgalee, was born on the east farm in 1900.

Now Erastus felt he would like to see his boys started as farmers, each having his own farm. George was given a farm near Chippewa Lake. So, on 1-31-1891, Erastus and Eliza deeded the old home and the lower, or east, farm in a joint deed to Ed and Ide and wives. They were to pay the present debts besides giving to the four daughters five hundred and fifty dollars apiece, this to be paid one year after his death. A note was given by Ed and Ide to each of sisters. This was similar to agreement given by his father to him. He and Eliza were to live with their sons and families their lifetimes. If Erastus could have lived a little longer, I feel maybe the stories of the lives of his boys might have been a little different.

Erastus, born 9-16-1814 in Bristol Center, N.Y., died 2-14 -1891 - buried in Friendsville. His remains were hoped to have been moved to LeRoy beside Eliza after her death, but a large locust tree had grown into grave. His monument is the tree but a granite marker is placed in LeRoy beside Eliza, born 9-11-1826 in Palmyra, Ohio; died 2-9-1910, and is buried in LeRoy cemetery.

After his death came a depression and from then on through 1890's the boys were bothered greatly by a debt too great for a farmer of those years. In 1900 they agreed to sell the old home farm to Freemont Phillips, whose grandmother, Mrs. Daniel Phillips, was Jonathan, Sr. Simmons' sister Acsah. Freemont's father was Oscar, and he married Sarah, his cousin, and Sarah's mother was Lucy Simmons Case, sister of

Jonathan and Acsah. Daniel and Acsah are buried in Friendsville Cemetery, close to Simmons graves.

Grandmother was a wonderful woman. She lived with us and then visited from time to time with her other children. There was a quietness about her I like to remember. There are many problems in raising a family, but Eliza always met them and the family heeded her words. My father, Ed, was the only one, they say, she ever spanked.

Those quiet hands must have always been very busy hands. I have heard her tell the grandchildren, "I've baked enough pies to reach from here to Medina." To us, as children, Medina was the far away place that we back of Chippewa Lake knew about. My sister, Margueritte, has the rolling pin.

There is much to tell about their lives that isn't in the chest. Erastus was a nervous, wiry, forceful man. The great love of his life was his family and his church. Every member got ready Sunday and was in their pew.

Aunt Hattie Burkholder told of a series of meetings that was held. Each one there should have said a word or a prayer or a little talk. Aunt Hattie couldn't say a word. Her father, Erastus, said on way home: "Hattie, you can talk , when asked, on most any subject. It seems strange to me that you cannot say something about what the Lord has done for you; if you cannot say anything of your own, I would commit something." The next evening Aunt Hattie was ready with her verse and a few words of her own.

They were always preparing for company or filling the picnic baskets. "Never skimp on a picnic basket."

Before Grandfather died in 1892, all had been very happy for him in so many ways; especially the fact that he had reared a large family and all were married. He was 36 years old when married.

The last to marry was Lillian May, who had married the young minister who came to the Universalist Church just a year or two before, the Rev. Franklin Buckner. They were married on May 14, 1890. This was his first pastorate. Soon after, this romance and then marriage, the Universalists wanted a new parsonage. They decided to build, and Erastus furnished the lumber.

Erastus influenced my life in my first hours by asking to name me Ruth, his mother's name. I was born Apr. 1, 1889. My sisters were born in the old Simmons home also: Caroline R. 1-30-1893 and Marguerite A. 3-30-1897. Our brother was born in Akron 2-4-1903. Named Edward Erastus.

The only other grandchild to be born in the home was Clyde E. Jones, son of their daughter Evaline.

I loved that old farm; I find myself going past my birth-place each year. I remember the old parlor with the what-not, the marble top table, the parlor furniture which the four sisters said was ruined by the three brothers, Geo., Ide, and Ed. Our sister, Marguerite, has had it repaired and uses it in her home. It is probably seventy-five years old and was bought for the home in LeRoy.

There was also the melodeon; Aunt Hattie was the one who loved to play. Grandmother Eliza loved flowers so she had a small glassed-in room off the living room where she raised geraniums, etc. - even an oleander tree given her by Cousin Delia Bissell who had gone to Florida. In my childhood she had two canaries.

The kitchen was large. In one end there was a long, long table. I do not remember anything on that table but a white cloth. We had good food, but different from now. Breakfasts were hearty - mush or pancakes, and meat in the wintertime. Then dinner was at noon. I do not remember that our supper was a big meal; maybe mush and milk or a cracked wheat cereal.

Every winter Grandma and my mother made a rag carpet for the kitchen; I thought it beautiful. My bedroom upstairs always had a new straw tick every year, with its feather-bed. I wonder if all girls like their rooms like I remember and liked mine. I also remember how cold it was in that room with no heat.

We went to LeRoy to school. Either we walked or were taken by our father. After I was eight years old, I drove old Rook or Bonnie to school. In my sixty-eight years there has been such a great difference in the way of life.

I should tell you that in the fall of 1899 my father, Ed, and I had typhoid fever. That was the straw that broke the camel's back and made further efforts to continue in farming, which was already a losing proposition, hopeless.

My sisters and I often talk about the moving to Akron after the farm was sold. We had three wagons driven there, one by our Grandfather Chauncey Hunt, the other two by Uncle George and Uncle Ide Simmons. Never was there such a long ride, we thought. It probably would be thirty miles from the farm to Akron.

We had a very comfortable home on Edgewood, near Five Points. We lived in Akron three years; I am sure it seemed like thirty years. My father wasn't well and he really wasn't used to working in a factory and was unhappy. There he really had the hardest time to make any kind of a living. Our mother always could sew and we looked well dressed at all times.

Our brother was born while we were in Akron -and that made life have more interest. However, we soon decided to go back to Medina Co. We traded our home for one on Center Street in Seville, where a Mr. White now lives. My father worked for Mr. Mert Frazier who sold implements.

In 1909 we moved to Medina because Dad was working for The Farmers' Exchange. He became acquainted with the International Harvester men and they asked him to sell to dealers and to the farmers, which he did until about 1921, when a change was made in selling implements. Then my father was home, which made my mother very happy.

There are a few years when Dad had just fill-in work. About 1925 he bought a few antiques while selling nursery stock. From that time

until 1929 my father and mother collected and sold many beautiful items. In Oct., 1929, we had a sale of antiques. This was luck because in November the stock market started to crash.

In 1930, my father went to Hartville to do some work for the Creston Basket Factory. They stayed there that summer, coming to Medina over the weekends.

On Aug. 25, 1930, our mother and father went early to Hartville. It was a hazy morning; we just don't really know how it happened but Dad drove onto the tracks in the path of a train and in Hartville, Stark Co., Ohio, our Dad and Mother met their death. They are buried in LeRoy, Ohio, cemetery.

The years in Seville and in Medina were happy years for us because I know now we had many things to be thankful for. Our parents taught us so many things we took for granted. Dad was often heard just talking a Bible verse. That verse had a point for your help. The Ten Commandments - we were just told to live our lives with their help. This was an indirect approach to something we did not think about at the time.

Mama was so wonderful about so many, many things. She always wanted us to go to the activities around school, church, and town. If we needed a new dress or just a different made-over dress, our mother spent that day getting it made. Dad often fried the raw potatoes and steak on these days. They were interested in whether we had a good time; we always had the best time ever.

Our parents were always there and good to come home to.

Transcribed by David L. Martin