

Childhood education often fell to parents in that era, so it was helpful that Will Jr.'s father could read and write. Mary, on the other hand, was almost certainly illiterate, as were most other females reared in Ireland during the 1700s (including her sister). It's evident from samples of Will Jr.'s written communications and personal reading materials, as well as from his general bearing and achievements as an adult, that he also had some formal schooling. One-room schoolhouses didn't appear in rural Mentz until the 1830s, but the hamlet of Montezuma, five miles northwest of the Bell farm, had three schools by 1813, and Auburn, the county seat, had several more six miles to the southeast. However grueling the trek, some children walked that far to school year-round, while others arrived in buggies and farm wagons. The question isn't whether young Will Jr. trudged off to school every day, but which school he attended. Nobody knows.

Cast of Characters - Chapter Five

William Bell, Jr.	(1801-1881)	m (1825)	Sally Beach	(1806-1853)
❖ Robert Bell	(1826-1879)	m (1847)	Margaret Weston	(1826-1892)
❖ Milo Bell	(1831-1891)	m (1853)	Margaret Wright (Ire)	(1824-1901)
❖ Electa Bell	(1833-1874)	m (1854)	Jacob Post	(1827-1877)
❖ Lavinia Bell	(1835-1894)	m (1869)	W. Frank Albro	(1837-1906)
❖ Mary C. Bell	(1842-1907)	m (1862)	Franklin McKone	(1836-1870)
❖ Sarah Martha Bell	(1848-1922)	m (1872)	Preston Wm. Ross	(1847-1929)

Cf. Chapter 8 for details about the descendents of Will Jr. and Sally.

Other Notable Figures

William H. Seward	(1801-1872)	Attorney, Brigadier General, New York State Senator, Governor and U.S. Senator, U.S. Secretary of State
Marquis de Lafayette	(1757-1834)	Major General (U.S.); Lieutenant General (France); French National Assembly, Chamber of Reps, Chamber of Deputies

Presidents of the United States

James Monroe	(1758-1831)	Tenure – 1817-1825
William Henry Harrison	(1773-1841)	Tenure – March 4-April 4, 1841
Martin Van Buren	(1782-1862)	Tenure – 1837-1841
John Tyler	(1790-1862)	Tenure – 1841-1845
Zachary Taylor	(1784-1850)	Tenure – 1849-1850
Millard Fillmore	(1800-1874)	Tenure – 1850-1853
Abraham Lincoln	(1807-1865)	Tenure – 1861-1865

Beach Life

Although the nature of farming spread them over a wide area, the Bells and their neighbors all knew and interacted with one another through churches, extended families, and organizations such as freemasonry and political parties. The Bells and the Gilmores, for example, who were related and owned abutting farms, attended Methodist camp meetings with Benjamin F. Beach and his second wife, Olive, whose farm was on the far side of the field, a half-mile southwest of the Bells and directly west of the Gilmores (*cf. "B. Beach", Map 5A and Map 5A1*). The Beaches had moved there a year after the Bells and were breeding almost as many children as sheep. The three eldest children, all females, were in their teens when they arrived, so Will Jr., going on 14, would barely have noticed their eight-year old sister, Sally; but when Sally herself reached her late teens, he suddenly realized the sun, moon and stars all revolved around her. She, evidently, thought the same about him and, in July 1825, when she was 18 and he 23, they married.

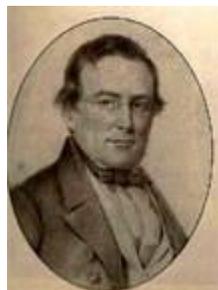
In doing so, she became the alliterative Sally Beach Bell – better, at least, than had she married into the neighboring Ball family (*cf. Map 5A1, below*). She dropped the Beach part anyway. Her given name, according to some, was Sarah, but even her tombstone identifies her as “Sally”². Her energetic father, Benjamin, and birthmother, Catherine Miller, had married in New Jersey in 1797, where Catherine bore their first three children: Jane, Daniel, and Martha. They then went to Vermont, where Daniel died at age four and their fourth child, Nancy, was born. Still migratory, they soon made their way to Mentz in New York’s Finger Lakes region, where several Beach relatives already were living. Catherine gave birth there to Sally on December 21, 1806, but died before Sally was two. To sustain his family, Benjamin married 20-year old Olive Bradley within a few months and she became Sally’s mother figure during her formative years. In 1815, they moved to the farm near the Gilmores and Bells, where Olive herself died in 1821, leaving Benjamin with more than a dozen children. His third wife, Mary Holcomb, was a year younger than his eldest daughter, Jane. With so many children, his proposal must have sounded more like a job offer, but Mary was the Mrs. Beach of record when Sally and Will Jr. married.

Four years *before* Mary Holcomb arrived on the scene, Jane had married Charles Paddack (alt sp: Paddock) and begun delivering children of her own: Orrin, Lucy, Rachel E. (who died at age 15), and Charles, Jr. They farmed east of the village of Montezuma until Charles Sr. died in 1853. Jane herself died a quarter century later (1878), and they now lie with Rachel in the Mentz Church Cemetery. The year before Jane’s death, their elder son, Orrin, whose wife had died, invited Bell Post to be a live-in servant and care for his children. She was his first cousin-once-removed and a granddaughter of Sally and Will Jr. Her parents, Jacob and Electa Bell Post, had died in Michigan, leaving Bell and her three siblings orphaned, whereupon Orrin and other relatives took them all in (*cf. Chp 8*). Women and children, especially, often died early back then.

The second Beach daughter, Martha, also married before Olive’s death and began farming in Mentz with her husband John Miller. Of their four children, only the first, Catherine (b 1822), named after Martha’s birth mother, lived long enough to marry. Two others died in infancy and a third, Elizabeth, died in 1845 at age 12. Catherine and her own husband, Daniel Adams, had

four children, of whom the eldest, Martha (b 1845), was living with the Millers in 1855, a month before her namesake grandmother, Martha Beach Miller, died at age 53. An obelisk now marks the elder Martha's grave at the Fosterville Cemetery, a few miles south of the Mentz Church.

The Beach's third daughter, Nancy, married Cyrus French on January 27, 1824, and farmed a mile to the southwest near Fosterville, where they reared seven children. She died at age 87 in Webster, New York, outside Rochester, where she had been living with her youngest son, Willard. Like her sister Martha, she is in the Fosterville Cemetery now, lying next to Cyrus who had died nineteen years earlier. (*Cf. Auburn Argus, Dec. 1891*)



An 1870 article in the *Auburn Daily Bulletin* related something extraordinary about the Beach family – or, more specifically, about Benjamin (*cf. portrait*).³ Not only did he marry three times, he fathered a new flock of children with each wife: five with Catherine, a whopping fourteen with Olive, and another ten with Mary – twenty-nine in all. Of those, just eighteen lived to adulthood and sixteen were still alive in 1870 when the article appeared (*Cf. Auburn Daily Bulletin, August 4, 1870*). Benjamin himself died (from sheer exhaustion no doubt) in 1838 and lies now in the Fosterville Cemetery among a multitude of his own offspring. Mary Holcomb Beach lived to be seventy-eight, dying in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1877, whereupon her family laid her to rest in the Woodland Cemetery south of Jackson – which is where William J. McKone, a grandson of Sally and Will Jr., also is buried (*cf. Chp 8*).

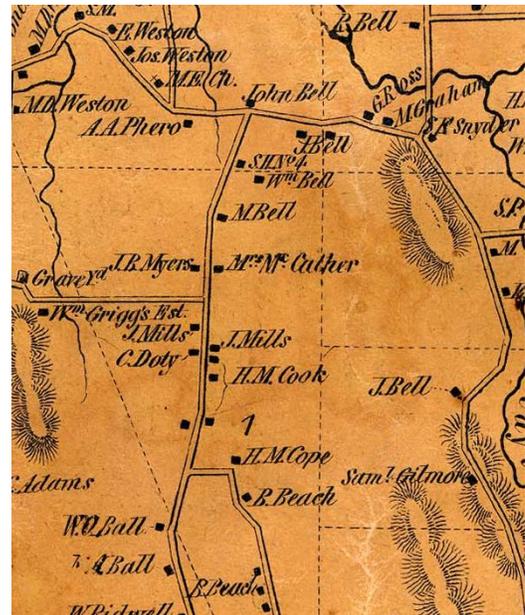
Primary Beach Characters

Benjamin Beach	(1771-1838)	m (1797)	Catherine Miller	(1776-1808)
❖ Jane Beach	(1798-1878)	m (1818)	Charles Paddack	(1793-1853)
❖ Daniel Beach	(1800-1804)		Died at age four	
❖ Martha Beach	(1802-1855)	m <1822>	John Miller	(1799-187_>
❖ Nancy Beach	(1804-1891)	m (1824)	Cyrus French	(1800-1872)
❖ Sally Beach	(1806-1853)	m (1825)	William Bell, Jr.	(1801-1881)
<u>Then Benjamin Beach</u>		m (1808)	Olive Bradley	(1786-1821>
❖ Fourteen Children				
<u>Then Benjamin Beach</u>		m <1822>	Mary Holcomb	(1799-1877)
❖ Ten Children				

A Full House

The Bell and Gilmore families, among others, had dedicated the Mentz Church meetinghouse (originally called “First Methodist Episcopal Church”) on June 23, 1825, (*cf. Chp 2*) just three weeks before Sally and Will Jr. married, making it remotely possible they were the first couple married there. During that era, though, the vast majority of weddings were private affairs in people’s homes, so it’s more likely they married at the Beach farm with Sally’s gaggle of half-siblings as witnesses. There’s no way to be certain because, in the 1980s, a son of the congregation’s recently deceased archivist burned all the church records. Historians still weep.

Where the newlyweds first lived also is unclear, but on April 1, 1830, they paid Hiram Ward \$1,200 for 69-acres along the northern edge of Lot 1 in Mentz (*cf. dotted lines adjacent to “Wm Bell”, upper center, Map 5A1, right. The large ‘1’ south and west of the map’s center point is the Lot number*). A year later, they bought an additional 16 acres east of there from Will, Jr.’s parents. The sale might have been the last deed transfer his mother approved before she died in 1832. That parcel, though, was in Lot 2 on the far side of another farm’s acreage and was hard to access. Unless Will Jr. had a pass-through agreement with the owner of the middle parcel, he would have had to lead his horses or oxen around to his 16-acre site by the roadways – hauling wagons, plows, and whatever else he needed for planting and harvesting. It was inconvenient at best. In 1833, then, he and Sally bought the 23-acre middle parcel and sold the isolated 16-acre site, leaving them with a single 92-acre tract at the northwest corner of Lot 1, which served as their core farm from then on.



Map 5A1 – Mentz – 1853



Their house sat at the crest of a long, sloping hill, overlooking rolling forests and fields in every direction (*Photo left: SW corner of remodeled Bell farmhouse in 1975*). At the foot of the hill, a quiet, shady lane wandered south past the multiple farms of Sally’s ever expanding birth family and, so, acquired the name “Beach Road”. In 1832, the Town of Mentz built “School House Number 4” down by the lane, a one-room affair which, over time, every Bell child attended (*cf. “S.H.No4” on Map 5A1*).⁴ The farm remains active today and the house, now with modern plumbing, electricity, and several additions, is still occupied. During a 2007 tour, Rod Jones, a Bell descendent and timber frame builder, noticed the oldest part of the house has a post-and-beam frame made of hand-hewn timbers with dimensions, scoring patterns, and joinery similar to those of the nearby Mentz Church (*cf. “M.E. Ch.”, Map 5A1*). The implication is that the family members who built the church meetinghouse in 1825 also built Sally and Will Jr.’s house.



Sally gave birth to their first child, Robert, on August 23, 1826. She was nineteen-years old at the time and, over the next twenty-two years, would bear another five children. A second son, Milo, came along in January 1831, followed by Electa in 1833 and Lavinia in 1835. Mary Catherine⁵ was born in 1842 and, when Sally was forty-one, Martha Sarah (alt. Sally) showed up on February 23, 1848. The longer gaps at the end might have been due to stillbirths and miscarriages, in which case there would have been no names. There at least are no tombstones at the Mentz Church Cemetery showing they had other children, and no others appear on Census records. For more on Sally and Will Jr.'s descendants, see Chapter 8 (*Photo: Former Bell house 1975 – the portion pictured was one of two separate houses combined to create a single house*)

Due, in part, to inadequate contraception, families with six or more children were common in those days. The *Beach* family would have been enormous in any era, but even Will Jr.'s brother, Sam, fathered nine children, and his younger brother, John, seven. Families that large were a challenge in urban tenements of that period, but a means of survival on farms. In cities, where most people exchanged labor for wages to buy food, clothing and shelter, children of low-income families consumed scarce resources. Even child labor in factories seldom covered their expense. On farms, by contrast, where families produced their own food and material goods, able-bodied children could contribute nearly as much as they consumed. The children of large city families with marginal incomes often ended up on the street, begging and stealing to get by. The children of large families on farms often helped the entire household eke out an existence, which, in part, explains how and why the Beaches came to have four separate farms in close proximity to one another (*cf. Map 5A1*) and how Will Jr.'s parents could fund his early cavalry gig (*cf. below*).

A review of deed records shows Sally and Will Jr., like his parents and brothers, often bought and sold other land. Some of that was a response to changing grain prices, growing more wheat this year, less barley the next, and so on. The goal in each case was to sell at a higher price than they'd paid; but Sally and Will Jr. also traded in real estate to help their children achieve financial stability as adults. In 1843, they paid \$1,560 to Will Jr.'s brother, John, for the 31-acre farm immediately south of theirs (one of a few different farms John owned at the time). That enabled them to do two things: 1) expand production as Robert and Milo took on more responsibility, and 2) provide a "starter" farm for each son when he married. Their daughters eventually had similar arrangements. In 1848, Sally and Will Jr. sold the 31-acre farm to Robert for the same \$1,560 they had paid five years earlier – which, given inflation, would qualify as a discount⁶. A few years later, Robert sold it to someone else and used the proceeds to buy a larger farm a mile away. His parents then bought the same parcel a second time and sold it to Milo in 1853 – again for \$1,560 (*Map 5A1, above*). A change in circumstances (*cf. Part II, below*) made that farm unavailable when Electa and Lavinia married, but they each received comparable assistance. Then, in 1861, when Mary was 19 and Martha 13, Will Jr. sold a separate 56-acre parcel to them jointly for the same total of \$1,560, which he himself had provided to them. The love and support he and Sally gave to their children is clear even from this distance. (*Cf. Chp 8 for details*)

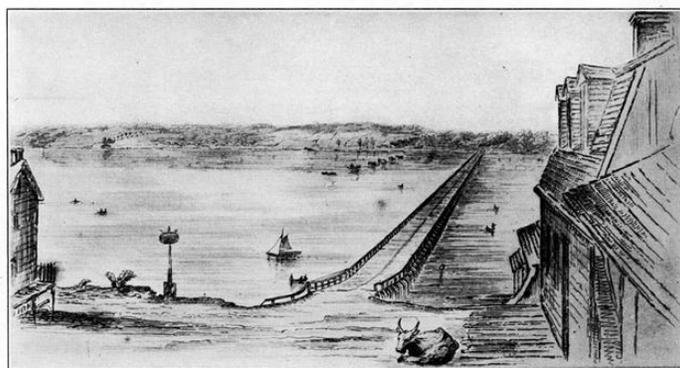
Pomp and Circumstance

Until the 1850s, New York required young men to participate in the state militia, but they could avoid the infantry and even form their own units by volunteering for cavalry or artillery duty. W.H. Seward, then a wealthy young Auburn attorney and aspiring politician, "...formed an artillery company with one brass gun and equipped the men largely at his own expense." The troops, in turn, *elected* him Captain and then Major. As the company grew into a battalion and, then, a regiment, he rose to Colonel, Brigadier General and, at age thirty-four, Major General.⁷

The 1906 article discussing Seward also said, "A regiment of cavalry was at one time maintained in the county and commanded by Col. William Bell of Throop who had formerly been one of its captains". The 13th Cavalry had formed in 1817 and Will Jr. joined as a young man, rising to the rank of Captain by age twenty-three. Cavalry members not only paid for their own uniforms, horses, and armaments, but, like Seward's artillery company, elected their own officers. Will Jr. had no wealth to equip the regiment as a whole, and no advanced education to impress others, so his election reflected the authentic high regard in which his comrades held him. He and/or his parents must have been doing well, though, because the cost of participation alone limited cavalry membership to more affluent families. As an online article says, the cavalry "was exclusive because it was expensive."⁸



In 1825, the year he married Sally and helped build the Mentz church, Will Jr. also was in command of the regiment when it welcomed the renowned Marquis de Lafayette (*cf. 1825 portrait*) to Cayuga County. Lafayette was visiting the newly opened Erie Canal during his yearlong farewell tour of the United States. Forty-five years earlier, General Lafayette, a 19-year old French aristocrat and fierce advocate of democracy, had led French and American troops under Gen. Washington and secured millions in crucial French funding to help win the War of Independence. His farewell tour, initiated by President Monroe, was therefore a nationally celebrated event, and an estimated 80,000 people, 65 percent of New York City's residents, had welcomed him at the pier when he arrived from France. Captain Bell greeted Lafayette at the mile-long Cayuga Lake Bridge west of Auburn (*cf. illustration*), and then led the procession into the city. (*Cayuga County Independent, March 3, 1881; Port Byron Chronicle, Oct. 21, 1911*)



Will Jr. was still a Captain as of May 31, 1838, but had risen to the rank of Colonel by the next year, when he placed this announcement in *The Auburn Journal and Advertiser*:

Regimental Orders, Mentz, May 22d, 1839. In pursuance of the power vested in me by chapter tenth (sic), of the first part of the Revised Statutes of this State — I William Bell, Jr., Colonel and Commanding Officer of the 13th Regiment of Cavalry, of the Militia of the State of New York, do hereby appoint a Regimental Court Martial for the trial of all Delinquents & Deficiencies in the said Regiment, to consist of three members, viz: Major John Bell, as President thereof; Captain Calvin Tracy and Quarter Master Oliver H. P. Wayne, as members. The said Court Will convene on the 12th. day of October next, at the American Hotel in the town of Auburn, and adjourn from time to time, as shall become necessary for the transaction of business.

William Bell, Jr. Colonel.

New York's militia participation law required regimental commanders to convene such Courts Martial to impose nominal fines on those who missed training exercises – an obligation rescinded (as noted below) seven years after Will Jr. posted that notice. The “Major John Bell” he mentioned was his younger brother (*cf. Chp 6*). Will Jr. remained in the cavalry at least another fifteen years and, in formal settings, identified himself by his rank the rest of his life. Decades later, a writer using the pen name “St. Elmo” said Will Jr. “was a conspicuous figure in the days of general training,” meaning the antebellum era, when militia activities were largely ceremonial and centered on preparing for battles they hoped would never come.

In *New York's Historic Armories*, Nancy L. Todd says, “On a local level, most communities expected their respective units to turn out for a variety of public events, such as Independence Day parades, county fairs and local political ceremonies. No civic activity was considered complete without the participation of the local militia in full dress ... As for the more private social and recreational aspects of the militia, local units often functioned as elite fraternal organizations.”⁹

Will Jr., for his part, served as Marshall of the 1839 Fourth of July parade and celebration in the village of Throopville, with some 300 people attending, including Revolutionary War veterans. Two years later, he created a lasting impression as he led his regiment in a parade through the City of Auburn. Recalling the event a full seventy years afterward, an anonymous writer said, “We can just remember [Col. Bell] as he sat on his favorite black horse. He was a superb, majestic figure on horseback, next to General Hancock. He was tall, erect, well proportioned. He was an ideal soldier on horseback with his red sash. He was to our boyish fancy a greater man than Caesar.” (*Port Byron Chronicle, October 21, 1911*)



Beneath the pageantry, though, both participants and civilians had serious concerns. On January 6, 1842, Will Jr. himself chaired a meeting of Brigade officers protesting the system:

Auburn, January 6th, 1842

Pursuant to public notice, a meeting of the Officers of the 7th Brigade of Infantry, assembled at the Western Exchange this day. The meeting being called to order and the object thereof stated. On motion, Col. Wm. Bell of the Cavalry was called to the Chair, and Lt. Col. L. Wilkenson appointed Secretary.

On motion, a committee was appointed to draft resolutions expressive of the sense of the meeting, who reported the following.

Resolved: That we heartily respond to the call for a Military State Convention at Albany on the 20th inst.

Resolved: That we consider the present military laws of this state defective and unequal; defective as relates to the general improvement in military tactics and discipline, and unequal and tyrannical in their operation, failing entirely to promote the objects for which they were designed.

Resolved: That in our opinion, the time has arrived when a thorough reform of the present military system in this state is necessary to its future existence, and that prompt and decisive legislative action alone can save the remnant from total annihilation, and the government and people from reproach.

Resolved: That as the Officers and men collectively composing the Militia of this state, seem resolved by common consent not to perform military duty under its present degraded and disorganized state, we confidently hope that the Wisdom of the proposed convention may suggest some plan that shall claim the speedy action of the Legislature – meet the approbation of the people – and secure to the government that arm of support designed by its first organization.

Resolved: That we consider it utterly impossible for us by the ____ patriotic exertion to sustain an _____ _____ing to its call, unsustained by public opinion, a byword abroad, and in its present condition, a disgrace to the country.

Resolved: That the proceedings of this meeting be signed by the Chairman and Secretary and published in the papers of the county, the Albany Argus and Evening Journal.

Wm. Bell, Chairman

L. Wilkenson, Secy. (*Auburn Journal and Advertiser, Jan. 26, 1842*)

The following essay on antebellum militias and their function in local communities provides some context for understanding both Will Jr.'s lengthy involvement and eventual retirement.

It is impossible to set an exact date for the beginning of the decline in interest in the militia but it is certain that the decline began many years before the Mexican War. The causes for it were many - lack of military necessity; rarity of drill days; expense and the commutation fees and fines. As the memory of the War of 1812 faded gradually from the public mind, the military spirit also declined. Militiamen in most cases only drilled on one day each year, and that usually in April or October. [9] In 1846 New York (and Connecticut) abolished compulsory service. Five other states did likewise in the coming decade. In place of the obligatory militia training, new laws provided for volunteer companies. Some states collected a small commutation fee in lieu of military duty and in New York this amounted to seventy-five cents. The money thus collected supported the volunteer independent corps. The *Niles National Register* became jubilant over the abolition of the compulsory militia law in New York: "We congratulate the people of this commonwealth warmly and heartily upon this emancipation from mock military duty. The Bill which cuts up the miserable system of militia oppression has become a law." [10]

As the compulsory system of universal military training waned, volunteering waxed. In some people, the martial spirit, combined with a love of colorful uniforms, ceremonials and martial music, was ever-present. Affluent volunteers saw in volunteer units instruments by means of which they could defend what they owned. The wealthier among them joined the cavalry, which was exclusive because it was expensive, while clerks and shopkeepers enrolled in grenadier, light infantry and other elite infantry companies. All volunteers had to be able to afford their affiliation: as much as \$72 for the uniform, an initial investment in armament, and various levels of dues. [11] Despite costs, volunteer units proliferated and as these volunteers became the only reliable part of the militia system, the states began to offer them more support. [Ed. Note: \$72 in 1850 would be similar to \$2,333 in 2019]

Festivals would have been drab without the volunteer militia, the units of which were easy to involve in public appearances. They conducted target shoots and marched with much ceremony to visit neighboring units. The encampments occasioned by these visits involved themselves and the host communities in gargantuan feasts, much fancy drill and sham battles.¹⁰

Will Jr. stayed on at least another 12 years after chairing that committee of officers, but there were no more Lafayette reunion tours and never any battles against armed opponents. It was just pomp and circumstance, fraternal entertainment and expense with no inherent endpoint. He was a colonel with a saber and horse, but no enemy. The last contemporaneous reference to his involvement in the state militia came in June 1854, when he served as Paymaster General at a Syracuse militia convention recognizing Veterans of the War of 1812 (*Cayuga Chief, June 1854*).

Six months earlier, family matters pushed the militia to the bottom of his priority list (*cf. "So Long, Sally", below*), which might also explain why, less than a decade later, he had no role in the military during the Civil War. At the War's onset, he was sixty years old and had around forty years of military experience, almost all of it as an officer and more than twenty as a Colonel. He also had been a long-time associate of then U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward and had actively campaigned in support of Abraham Lincoln's presidency. Watching from the sidelines as a conflict of that magnitude and personal import unfolded might seem odd for someone of his stature and experience, but significant changes in his family situation required that he remain home. Nevertheless, he carried the title "Col. William Bell" with dignity and pride to his dying day. (*Daguerreotype below, New York State Militia members, ca. 1850*)



Government by the People

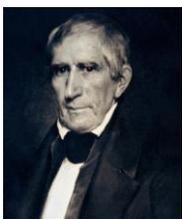


Will Jr. and his brothers also immersed themselves in politics early on. He and Sam, for example, were two of seven delegates from Mentz to attend a countywide convention of Anti-Masonic Republicans in 1832, which is bewildering because all the men in their family were Masons – or, at least, had been until then. The Western Exchange hotel in Auburn (*cf. left*) hosted the convention’s ninety to one-hundred delegates on October 19.

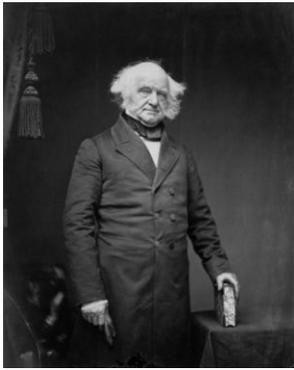
Another attendee was Will Jr.’s militia colleague, William H. Seward (*photo*), the Major General who later would serve as Governor, U.S. Senator, and Lincoln’s Secretary of State. Like Will Jr., he had been born in Montgomery County’s Town of Florida in 1801 and was an active Mason. Then, in the 1830s, a combination of religious fervor, scandal and political expedience made freemasonry so controversial in upstate New York that membership fell by some 85% across the state, and the number of lodges, from 507 to 48. The decline coincided with the rise of the Anti-Masonic Party, initiated by Thurlow Weed of Rochester and championed by Seward and other emerging leaders. Weed and his most ardent followers focused on stamping out freemasonry, which they considered corrupt and un-American; but Seward and others were concerned primarily with defeating President Andrew Jackson, a Democrat whom they believed to be undermining democracy.



It’s possible that Seward, Will Jr. and Sam temporarily renounced their Masonic ties, but not all Party members did. In fact, their 1832 presidential candidate, William Wirt, remained an active Mason throughout the campaign and even defended freemasonry when he accepted the nomination. Even so, several resolutions at Auburn’s local convention in 1832 were outright assaults on the fraternity, and one wonders whether Will Jr. and Sam actively supported them or sat with their heads down, shifting uncomfortably in their seats. The Party won some state and local elections that fall (Seward became a state senator) and a few seats in the U.S. House, but failed to capture any U.S. Senate seats, and Jackson the Mason swamped his opponents. Two years later, in 1834, Will Jr., Sam and William Seward all threw in with Henry Clay, John Quincy Adams, and the National Republicans to form the Whig Party – and went on being Masons.



The first Whig presidential candidate was William Henry Harrison (*cf. left*), who lost to Democrat Martin Van Buren in 1836. The Whigs then redoubled their efforts for the 1841 campaign. On September 28, 1837, Will Jr. and Sam again made their way to a countywide convention at the Western Exchange (same process, different party), and Will Jr. participated in yet another convention two years later to elect delegates to the district convention. Convention objectives were the same then as they are now: 1) elect delegates to yet more conventions and 2) pass arcane resolutions that denounce the appalling incompetence of the opposition while inflating the virtues of the home team. It was more fun than mucking out barns, apparently.



At it happened, President Van Buren (*cf. left*) was touring New York while the 1839 Cayuga Whig convention was underway, and the Party's resolutions pummeled him mercilessly, claiming his visit was a shameful descent into partisan politics at the literal expense of the nation. Before he arrived in the Auburn area, Van Buren's staff asked the state militia to provide a cavalry unit to greet and escort him into the city. Such escorts were voluntary and primarily ceremonial – bits of fluff to add pomp and circumstance to important occasions (such as Lafayette's anniversary tour). As it happened, though, not a single Cayuga County militia unit agreed to participate. Every officer in charge claimed an escort by the non-partisan forces would be inappropriate because the President's visit was part of a political campaign, not an official State visit. The extent to which the Whig Convention that week influenced Will Jr.'s own opinion is open to speculation, but he and his cavalry regiment joined in the boycott.

A local Democratic newspaper with the off-putting name *State Prison Tocsin* (i.e., prison alarm bell) claimed Will Jr., in particular, had snubbed the President in return for a pledge by his Whig Party friends to promote him to the rank of Major General. In those days, the Governor's office facilitated militia promotions at that level, and the Governor in 1839 was none other than Will Jr.'s long-time military and political crony, William H. Seward. The *Tocsin's* toxic article was a sleazy, unfounded attack, which, contrary to the paper's purported allegiance to "truth and common sense," was typical of its biased reporting. The *Auburn Journal and Advertiser*, a Whig paper, printed several rebuttals and challenged the *Tocsin* to prove its claims, which it never did. The *Journal* then published an editorial on October 16, attaching a letter from Will Jr. himself, dated October 4, 1839 (*cf. right and next page*).

After losing to Van Buren in 1836, William Henry Harrison and the Whigs changed tactics in 1840, launching the first presidential campaign to use a slogan, viz., "Tippecanoe and Tyler, Too." It portrayed Harrison as "Ol' Tip," the reputed military hero. John Tyler, in turn, was his all-but-inconsequential (and, as it happened, overtly racist) running mate. The slogan and images of a log cabin played up Harrison's exploits as a frontier Indian fighter, contrasting

Several weeks since, the Tocsin charged Gov. Seward with having ordered the Whig flag (raised in honor of the visit of the President) to be taken down, and that it was carried to his house! This we at once showed to be false—for, in the first place, he knew nothing of the flag being up, until after it had been taken down—and in the next place, that so far from any order for its being taken to his house, it was not removed at all from the American until wanted the next day for the Whig Convention! But although the want of truth in both these particulars has been sufficiently pointed out to satisfy any honorable person, yet the Tocsin editors have not since even so much as hinted that their former assertion was at all wanting in truth.—With them, it must be, that a lie well stuck to is as good as the truth! As a corroboration of the belief that such is their creed, we give place to the following card from Col. Bell, relating to another equally base and groundless charge of the Tocsin's,—which, although disproved at the time, has never yet been withdrawn in the columns of that paper. We have had it for some days in our possession, but avoided giving it publicity in the hope that the conductors of that print would, of their own sense of honor and self-respect, be induced to make the amende honorable. But alas! alas!

his alleged rugged manliness with the relative frilliness of Van Buren, “who came across ... as a dandy ... who looked and acted like an aristocrat” (*American President.org*). Harrison also had studied to be a physician, which extended his base to the professional classes. The new approach worked and Harrison won. Once elected, though, his most notable achievement was to deliver the longest inaugural speech in history (8,445 words). Within weeks, he was “seized by a pleurisy-fever and after a few days of violent sickness, he died ... just one month after his inauguration”.¹¹ His vice-president, Tyler, then compounded the dismay of Whig leaders by turning out to be so appalling a president they threw him out of the Party.

Harrison’s death at the peak of the Party’s political triumph must have been devastating for the Bell brothers and other Party loyalists, but they managed to regroup and move forward. In 1846, Sam himself won a two-year term in the New York State Assembly (*cf. Chapter 4*). He and Will Jr. also attended the Whig northern district convention for Cayuga County in 1847, and Will Jr. chaired the local convention in 1852 before representing the district at both the Senatorial and Judicial conventions the following year. At the national level, the Whigs managed to elect Cayuga County native Millard Fillmore as Vice-President in 1848, from where, in 1850, he ascended to the presidency upon the death of war hero Zachary Taylor, the second Whig to die in office – an omen, no doubt. Strong internal disagreement over the possible expansion of slavery into the territories (“Cotton” versus “Conscience”) then led to the Party’s demise. In the election of 1852, it nominated Winfield Scott over its own incumbent, Fillmore, and never won another presidential election. “Its leaders quit politics (as Lincoln did temporarily) or changed parties. The voter base defected to the nativist Know-Nothing Party, [the] Republican Party, various coalition parties in some states, and even to the Democrats.”¹² The whole thing was a mess.

MESSRS. OLIPHANT & SKINNER.—I saw in your paper of the 2nd inst. an article which appeared in the Cayuga Tocsin of 25th ult., stating that Hon. Christopher Morgan, our member elect to Congress, had on the day in which Mr. Van Buren came into Auburn, given me a pledge that I should be promoted to the rank of Major General, the ensuing winter, if I would not comply with the invitation to escort him (Mr. Van Buren) into the village. So far from being true, or the shadow of truth attached to it, I did not see Mr. Morgan on that day nor for some time previous; nor did we ever have any conversation on that subject, since or before, either directly or indirectly, nor has any other person to my knowledge. I pronounce the whole a foul fabrication; nor have I any reason to expect such a promotion, as I know of no vacancy.—Gratifying as such an appointment would be, I have never named the subject to Gov. Seward in case of a vacancy. What arrangements the friends of Mr. Van Buren made for his reception I know not. I was solicited to volunteer with my regiment to escort him into town, which I refused to do, stating that he was on an *electioneering tour* and I would not condescend to countenance him in such a course. These were my own views, without consulting those of others, as heretofore stated in the Tocsin—although I had learned the opinion of our military friends, which agreed in substance with my own.

WILLIAM BELL, Jr.

Mentz, Oct. 4, 1839.

Will Jr., for his part, joined the hapless hopefuls who shifted briefly to the Know-Nothings. Its formal name was the "American Party," but it acquired the more familiar and infamous title because of its organized and persistent secretiveness about its own platform. Leaders instructed delegates to answer questions about official Party positions by saying, "I know nothing", which was akin to saying: "We're not telling you who we are or what we're planning to do, but vote for us anyway." Many of its own members had no idea who or what they were supporting. If they had, they might well have gone elsewhere.

In brief, the leaders of the American Party were white Anglo-Saxon power brokers in New York City whose primary aim was to defeat Tammany Hall, a graft-ridden political machine that had seized power in New York by playing on the despair of the city's large Irish Catholic immigrant population. The immigrants supported Tammany Hall because the city's "old guard" power brokers were stiff-necked bigots who considered them culturally and biologically inferior and treated them as subhuman. Tammany Hall leaders exploited Irish Catholic frustration and anger by doing favors in exchange for votes, and then diverted municipal funds into their own pockets. It was straightforward graft.

The old guard responded by trying to restrict voting to people actually born in the United States – the majority of whom were white Anglo-Saxon Protestants like them. The American Party's hidden agenda, in other words, was to deprive every immigrant in America of the right to vote so that white Protestant business leaders in New York City could regain control of the municipal government for their own gain. It was to keep that agenda secret that they told operatives around the country to answer questions about Party objectives with "I know nothing."

Will Jr.'s father, uncles and two older brothers were all Irish immigrants and every one of them considered their right to vote sacred. It was a major factor in the older generation's decision to immigrate in the first place, so it is inconceivable that Will Jr. would knowingly support any effort whatever to deprive them of that right. The only reasonable explanation for his fleeting flirtation with the American Party is that, in the midst of all the political transitions and tumult of that decade, he unknowingly aligned himself with an agenda he would consider as abhorrent as Tammany Hall. The Know-Nothings, in any event, recycled Cayuga County native and previ-

Whig Meeting in Mentz.

At a meeting of the Whigs of the town of Mentz held at J. W. Trufant's in the village of Montezuma, on the 30th September, 1852,

Col. WM. BELL, Jr., was chosen Chairman, and DELOS BRETT, Secretary.

On motion, it was resolved that this meeting proceed to appoint Delegates to the County Convention, to be held at Auburn on the 9th day of Oct., 1852.

On motion, the following persons were appointed Delegates:

Daniel D. Buck, M. B. Converse, Jas. W. Hamilton, Thos. B. Myers, Levi J. Hopkins, Morton Hosford, C. H. Gamwell, J. V. Griggs, Col. Wm. Bell, Jr.

On motion, C. W. Haynes was appointed Delegate at large.

On motion, it was resolved that this meeting proceed to appoint Delegates to the Congressional Convention, to be held at Lyons, on the 16th day of Oct., 1852.

Col. S. P. Jacobs and Col. Wm. Bell, Jr., were chosen as such Delegates.

On motion, it was resolved that each Delegate be authorized to appoint a substitute.

On motion, it was resolved that the Chair appoint the Town Committee.

Morton Hosford, Daniel D. Buck, Delos Brett, were chosen said Committee.

Resolved, That the proceedings of this meeting be published in the Auburn Journal and Port Byron Gazette.

On motion, this meeting adjourned.

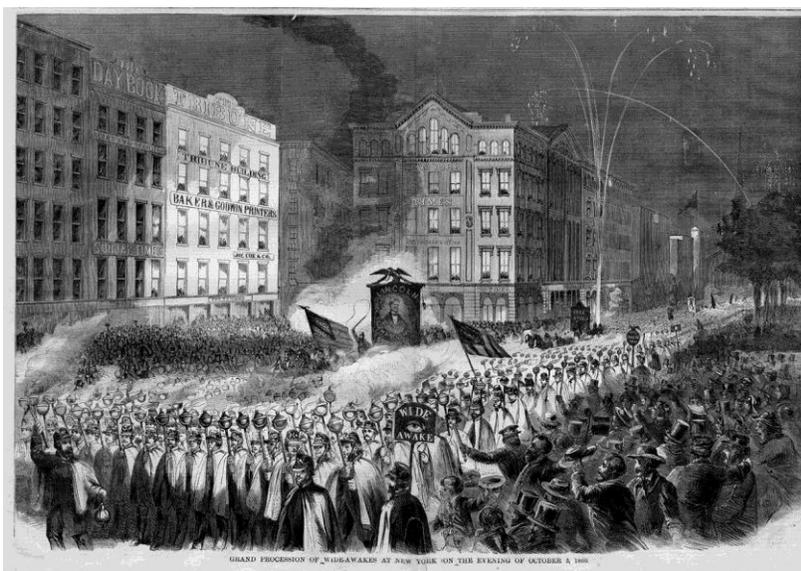
WM. BELL, Jr., Ch'n.

DELOS BRETT, Sec.

ously dumped Whig President, Millard Fillmore, as its 1856 presidential candidate and he came in dead last. The Party then disbanded and Will Jr. escaped with his integrity intact.

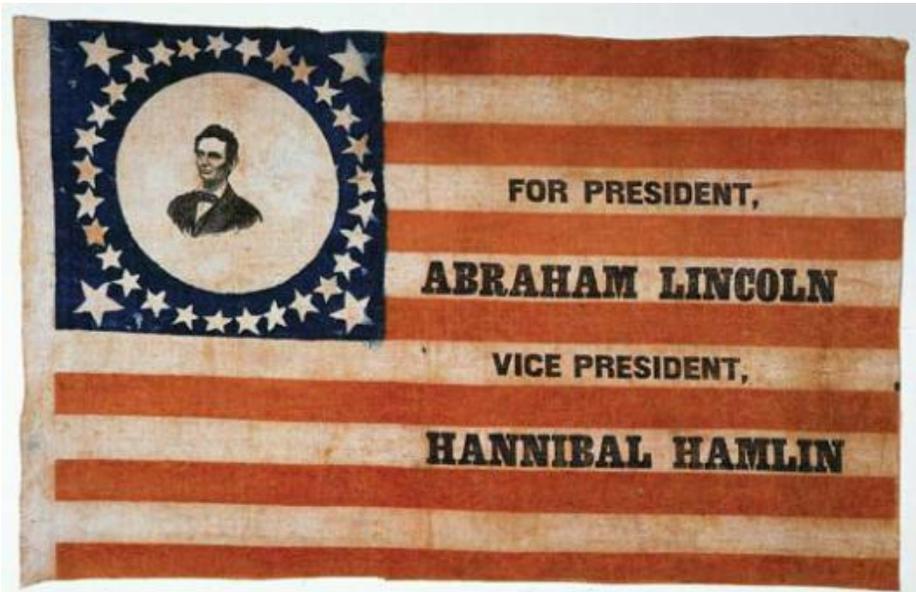
From there, he joined the fledgling Republican Party, a merger of former Whigs and Free Soilers who found common ground in their opposition to slavery. In the build-up to the Party's 1860 Presidential nomination, Will Jr. backed his friend and former militia comrade, William Seward, who was, by then, a U.S. Senator. Seward was a classic statesperson and the Party favorite in the days leading up to the Party's national convention in Chicago. Abraham Lincoln's backers, however, managed to push the vote past the first two ballots and win the nomination on the third. Seward was shocked and heartbroken, but as with Will Jr. and other Cayuga Republicans, he soon fell in line behind Lincoln's candidacy. That, in turn, enabled him to serve as Lincoln's Secretary of State and help guide the North through the Civil War. He also purchased Alaska on behalf of the nation. On the down side, a Booth crony nearly assassinated him.

During the summer and fall of 1860, Will Jr. and other Republican activists formed Lincoln and Hamlin clubs throughout the north to campaign for candidates at both local and national levels. The clubs organized along military lines to enable effective action and called members "Wide Awakes". The Montezuma chapter elected Maj. Washington Bogardus president (*cf. Sam and the Erie Canal Project, Chp 4*) and Will Jr. (Col. William Bell) vice-president or "Captain". They even had a band. During the first week of October, the clubs held major rallies in cities throughout the north, including New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and Cleveland (*cf. illustration, below*). Delegates and club members flooded into Auburn, too, arriving by train and carriage from as far away as Geneva and Canandaigua. The October 6, 1860, edition of the *Auburn Weekly Union* carried the story under a blazing headline trumpeting the "Grand Mass Meeting" of 15,000 and a night parade of 1,300 Wide Awakes who crowded Auburn's streets with banners, "transparences" and mottos. A sub-headline also warned that "Border Ruffians" were about, which might have been a reference to Democrats intent on disrupting the rally or, more likely, simple ne'er-do-wells looking for pockets to pick and other ways to cause trouble.



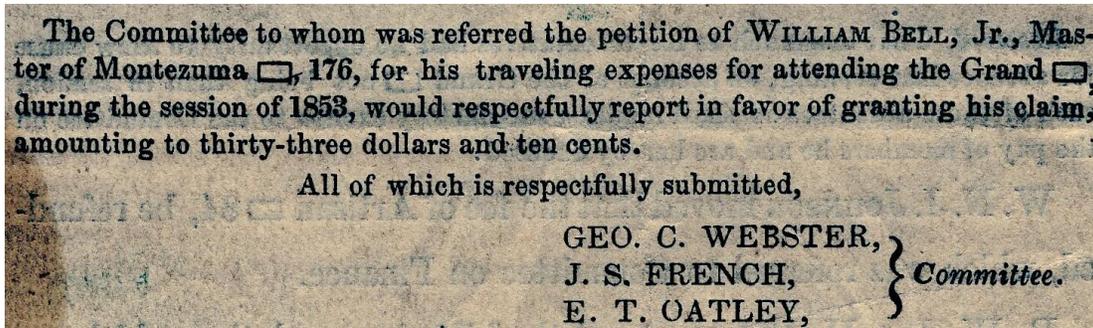
The article said a freak winter storm two days earlier had muddied the roads, discouraging some delegates from coming, but downtown Auburn was still awash in bands, banners and portraits of Lincoln, along with "a number of axes, beetles, and wedges". The axes and wedges were emblems of Lincoln, "the rail splitter". The banners bore messages such as "Lincoln the noblest work of God, because he is an honest

man,” “Free Speech and Free Homes,” “As he split the rails, so he splits the Democrats,” and “We’re wide Eye wake to the subject” (*sic*). The contingent from Montezuma streamed into the downtown by way of Clark Street “with a beautiful Lincoln Banner, and lots of axes, beetles, wedges, and other emblems.” The paper said, “They numbered some thirteen wagons with upwards of sixty men, and were commanded by Col. William Bell.” He was no longer in the militia at that point, but the word “commanded” conjures an image of him in his most impressive military regalia, with red sash and saber, riding along on his noble, prancing horse ahead of the club’s band and parade of wagons. Lincoln, of course, won the election a month later. The significance of “beetles”, though, seems to have been lost to history.



Masonic Mysteries

Despite his brief flirtation with the Anti-Masonic political party, Will Jr., like his father and three brothers, remained, for most of his adult life, “... an active and influential member of the Masonic fraternity.” (*St. Elmo, “William Bell, Jr.,” Obituary, 1881*) After belonging to the Montezuma lodge for decades, he helped found the Morris Chapter in 1855 and served several times as its Master of the Lodge. Reporting on the Chapter’s first meeting, the *Auburn Daily American* said his lodge brothers had elected him “King” – second only to the “Most Worshipful High Priest”, the kind of terminology that helped inspire the Anti-Masonic Party twenty years earlier.



The Committee to whom was referred the petition of WILLIAM BELL, Jr., Master of Montezuma □, 176, for his traveling expenses for attending the Grand □, during the session of 1853, would respectfully report in favor of granting his claim, amounting to thirty-three dollars and ten cents.

All of which is respectfully submitted,

GEO. C. WEBSTER,
J. S. FRENCH,
E. T. OATLEY, } Committee.

In early 1854, Will Jr. cut this ribbon of paper (*cf. enlargement, above*) from his lodge minutes and later kept it in his 1856 edition of *Macoy’s Masonic Manual*, where a descendent came upon it in 2006 – 125 years after his death. It refers to his reimbursement for expenses incurred as the delegate of the Montezuma Lodge to the statewide Grand Lodge at Metropolitan Hall in New York City in December 1853. His expenses of \$33.10 would be the equivalent of around \$1,000 today (using the CPI), an amount consistent with a 600 mile round-trip by train plus meals and a hotel. The trip would have taken around 25 hours each way. The slip of paper might have represented nothing more to Will Jr. than a personal record and handy bookmark, but the precision with which he cut it, along with its date and subject matter, suggest it also served as a keepsake, a reminder of something close to his heart.

His heart, as it happened, was in tumult while the Grand Lodge was underway, and being there afforded him a measure of detachment unavailable back home. Just a few weeks earlier, Sally had died, leaving him not only bereft of his life partner, but with sole responsibility for running the farm and nurturing their four daughters, all of whom were still at home – and two of whom were less than thirteen years old. (*Drawing: Masonic Grand Lodge, Metropolitan Hall, New York City, 1850s*)¹³



So Long, Sally

Sally had died November 16, 1853, at age forty-seven, leaving Will Jr. without his life partner of 28 years and leaving their six children “...to mourn the loss of an excellent mother” (*St. Elmo*). Yet, apart from that one, generic epitaph by Montezuma’s local reporter, there are few, if any, references to Sally herself to reveal what she was like and what she meant to those left behind. If any stories, remnants of her writing, or personal keepsakes have come down through the generations, they’ve ended up somewhere other than here. Her tombstone in the Mentz Church cemetery (*cf. right*) features a hand pointing to heaven, suggesting she was a woman of faith, but, otherwise, she remains faceless and unknown – a vague image of an actual person with thoughts, feelings, and relationships.



As “St. Elmo” implied, the clearest testaments to Sally’s life were her children, each of whom great to become a loving and decent, hardworking person. Robert, the eldest, was twenty-five when she died and was farming less than a mile away with his wife and son (who was the same age as Sally’s youngest child). Twenty-two year old Milo also had married and was working the farm just south of his parents. Her four daughters – Electa (20), Lavinia (18), Mary C. (11) and Martha (5) – all remained home throughout that winter, and Will Jr. evidently considered the older two sufficiently mature, responsible, and resourceful to manage the household and ensure the welfare of their younger sisters while he headed off to that convention in New York City.

Some might wonder if heading off like that so soon after their mother’s death implies Will Jr. was insensitive to the emotional needs of his daughters – especially Mary and Martha. The question lingers, in part, because her cause of death has been lost to time. If she died suddenly, then leaving his daughters in the midst of their grief to attend a lodge event hundreds of miles away would seem self-centered and callous; but if her death came after a long, lingering illness, they might already have processed their immediate grief and been ready to move on with their lives. For now, there’s no way to assess the impact of her death or Will’s brief absence on any given family member, but again, all the observable threads of his life make clear that Will Jr. was a kind and principled man, a person of faith, who cared deeply about the welfare of his children.

Electa and Lavinia, who, at the time, were about the age Sally had been when she married, soon moved out of the house: Electa to the home of her own groom, Jacob Post, and Lavinia to live with the family of their eldest brother, Robert, a mile away. That left twelve-year old Mary and six year-old Martha without mature female guidance as they grew toward womanhood. Even if Will Jr. understood their pubescent needs, fathers simply did not get involved in their daughters’ maturation issues. What Mary and Martha needed was a strong, caring mother figure, and Will Jr. himself needed a mature female partner to take charge of their home life. And so, within just a few months of Sally’s death, he found a new wife. (*Cf. Chp 7, “Will Jr. and Mary”*)

ENDNOTES – CHAPTER 5

- ¹ Both official and unofficial historical documents variously identify Samuel’s wife as Judith, Judath, Judah, and Julia, and there is no clear path to knowing which name is historically accurate.
- ² According to several sources, Sally Beach’s formal first name was “Sarah”. Stephen Babcock lists her that way on his family tree, and Sally’s grandson, W.J. McKone, listed her as “Sarah Beach” on the death certificate of his mother, Mary C. Bell McKone, who was Sally’s daughter. Although McKone was born thirteen years after Sally’s death, he was college-educated, a published author, and the President of Michigan’s State Board of Education, so it is safe to assume he would take pains to be accurate in entering his grandmother’s name on his own, quite beloved mother’s death certificate. By contrast, Jacob Post, a farmer married to Sally’s daughter, Electa, identified his mother-in-law as “Sally Beach” for Electa’s death certificate because that was what family and friends actually had called his mother-in-law. Sally’s gravestone, in fact, identifies her as “Sally Beach”, not “Sally Bell”.
- ³ (Purportedly) Benjamin F. Beach, father of Sally Beach. Photo courtesy of “Find A Grave”, Memorial ID: 113117473. www.findagrave.com/memorial/113117473
- ⁴ There was little, if any, government documentation or regulation of construction on private property in that era, and property deeds seldom indicated the presence of buildings. The current Cayuga County Tax Assessment record dates the Bell’s farmhouse to 1840, but the County Assessor said in 2018 that the dates assigned to pre-twentieth century structures are mere guesses by field agents who focus on current values, not precise history. The original framework of the Bell house at least narrows the date to the early 1800s. During a 2006 tour of the house by Bell descendents, Rod Jones, a timber frame builder and great-great grandson of Will Jr., noticed the timbers and joinery in the attic are the same style and size as those of the nearby Mentz Church which, according to historical documents, the Bells, Gilmores and others built and dedicated in 1825. Timber frame construction was common in churches and barns, so the method, in itself, doesn’t show exactly who built the house or when; but the similarities in the component parts and connections suggest that some of the same people were involved in building each. Just as a literary expert might identify the author of a book by its style and vocabulary, Jones noticed the timbers and joinery in the house and church have the same dimensions, tool marks, and fittings. In each case, he said, “The timbers are six by ten inches [and] hand-hewn, probably with an axe to score across the grain and a broad axe to flatten the faces.” He also thought the builders in each case used a “muley saw” (*cf. illustration, above*) to cut logs into boards for the flooring and siding of the two buildings, a process in which a “long flat blade, set vertically, moved up and down [like] a jigsaw. The [blades] were sometimes ganged up to cut several boards at once.” (Robert “Rod” Jones, E-mail Message, August, 2006). (*Sketch: muley saw*)

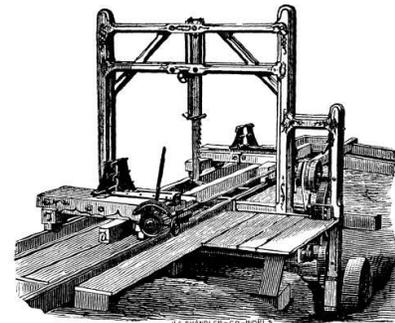


Fig. 35. Engraving of portable muley sawmill. FOURTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INDIANA STATE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE, 1877.

- At some point, the Bells or a later owner enlarged the original house by joining part of another two-story house to it, creating a double-thick wall at the center. During their years of occupancy, the Vitales also added a spacious room at the front and a large twenty-first century kitchen at the rear. Yet, features of the original house are still evident. For instance, a primitive, rock-lined cellar beneath the original house remains intact and accessible through an exterior door built into the hillside. There’s also a 35-foot, stone-lined well near the back of the house that Paul Vitale said dates to the antebellum era, when Will Jr. and Sally lived there.
- ⁵ Most official documents related to Mary (including her death certificate) list only her middle initial, “C”. None, however, has yet surfaced with her full middle name. Nineteenth century families of Scot-Irish heritage commonly named female children after their mothers’ female relatives, and the most prominent female in Sally or Will’s life with the initial ‘C’ was Sally’s birthmother, Catherine Miller, who died when Sally was just two years old. Based on that, I am guessing—and only guessing – that Mary’s middle initial stood for “Catherine”. When her younger sister, Martha, was a child, Sally and Will Jr. called her “Sally”, which was a derivative of “Sarah”. Martha began using her first name around the time she entered puberty. The last formal document referring to her as “Sally” may be the deed to a 56-acre parcel her father and stepmother transferred to Mary and her in March 1861, the month following her thirteenth birthday.

⁶ The chart below from the Non-Population Schedule of the 1850 Census shows how Robert’s “starter” farm compared with his parents’ larger, more established farm.

1850	Im- proved Acres	Farm Cash Value	Value Imple- ments	Horses	Milch (sic) Cows	Oxen	Other Cattle	Sheep	Swine	Value Live- stock	Wheat Bush- els	Rye Bush- els	Corn Bush- els	Oats Bush- els
Robert	30	1,500	121	2	2	0	1	0	4	200	80	0	25	50
Will Jr	100	5,900	210	4	6	2	8	13	14	803	500	100	100	200

⁷ McDougall, Gen. Clinton D.. “Military History,” The Auburn Bulletin, May 2, 1901.

⁸ Author Unknown. Union Blue and Militia Gray: The Role of the New York State Militia in the Civil War, Chapter 1, Antecedents and Organization. April 6, 2006. Cf. www.dmna.state.ny.us/historic/reghist/civil/UnionBlue/UnionBlueChap1.htm.

⁹ Todd, Nancy L. New York’s Historic Armories: An Illustrated History; State University of New York Press, p. 29, 2006.

¹⁰ *Op.Cit.* Union Blue and Militia Gray.

¹¹ Portrait and Biographical Album of Hillsdale County, Michigan, Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1888.

¹² Whig Party (United States). [https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whig_Party_\(United_States\)](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whig_Party_(United_States))

¹³ Sketch: 1850 Grand Lodge of New York, Tripler Hall, New York City; renamed “Metropolitan Hall” prior to Grand Lodge of 1853.

Maps

5A: Sub-section, Town of Mentz, 1853. Full map available through Cayuga County Historian’s Office.

5A1: Enlarged Sub-section, Town of Mentz, 1853.