

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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Left to Right: Brown's Berry Patch marker dedicated on Oct. 7th. Eric Brown; Robert Brown II; Robert Brown III; Robert Brown, grandfather; Ralph Brown, father of Eric and Robert II and grandfather of Robert III.

BROWN'S BERRY PATCH MARKER DEDICATED

It is fortunate that in her old age, Bathshua Brown told her story to her grandson, John Gardner Brown, Jr. He in turn passed the tale along to later generations, and then to Mrs. Harry Brown, the mother of Robert R. Brown. She then shared it with our late Town Historian, Helen Allen, who put it into print in a local newspaper, about 50 years ago.

But - stories passed from generation to generation are not in themselves enough; they are folklore. However, in the book: "Pioneer History of Orleans County, New York" by Arad Thomas, written in 1871, Lansing Bailey, one of the early pioneers in the Town of Gaines, also tells the story - of British troops landing from the lake at the mouth of Oak Orchard Creek, and in Bailey's words: "Would probably come up to the Ridge, if not repulsed."

The Bathshua Brown story was put into print under the title of: "My Grandmother's Revenge". This title might be questioned. Her story seems to be one of a sensible mother and grandmother, using her strong intelligence and common sense, to do whatever she could to protect her family and neighbors, at time of war. The war was the War of 1812, and considerable activity, in the form of raiding parties of British troops, occurred all along the south shore of Lake Ontario throughout the summer of 1813. This was the means by which the enemy replenished their supplies.

Bathshua was born in 1755 on Long Island. In 1774 she married Elijah Brown. Following their marriage they took up residence on Fishers Island, just off the coast from Mystic, Connecticut.

They, along with other members of the Brown family, farmed the entire island. One of their markets was the West India Islands, and to transport their marketable goods they maintained their own ship.

Elijah and Bathshua were pious, God fearing folk, with great energy, and eventually became the parents of 17 children; 12 of who it is written lived to be adults.

Lands in the Holland Land Purchase became available at the beginning of the 19th Century. At that time the Browns took up a sizable section of Township 16, Range 2. This wilderness was best reached by travel along the Lake. Elijah Brown, along with others, was first here in 1803 - probably building living quarters and clearing some of the land. In the Spring of 1804, Elijah Brown brought his family to their new home. The trip along the lake would not have been easy, especially for a man of 56, in charge of a major move for a large family. He was taken ill and died before they reached their destination. His widow, Bathshua, who was then 49 years old, and his family brought his remains to their tract of land, and he was buried. Elijah's grave is in the Brown Cemetery, at The Bridges, and is the oldest marked burial in Orleans County.

The widow Brown was equal to the task ahead. She still had five Brown sons and a large number of healthy daughters, and they went forward to make their home in this wilderness forest of Western New York.

By 1813, Bathshua was 58 years old, and her family had established themselves in a comfortable manner. By this

time, also there was quite a settlement of other neighbors on most lands within a few miles of the lake.

And - the United States was at war. In July of 1813, a ship load of settlers were returning from a trip to Oswego, laden with necessary supplies. As they approached within a short distance of Oak Orchard they were sighted by an English war ship. According to the legend, the Captain of this ship was reported to be the same officer who caused so much distress and havoc to the Brown family many years before on Fishers Island.

A boat was launched from the British vessel and an armed party of troops took after the settlers. The settlers managed to get into the channel and up the creek, known well to them, and were far enough ahead to gain access to the shelter of March Creek.

The time span of this encounter apparently was long enough for others to be warned. Neighbors managed to have themselves armed, and word was spread to those living even south of Ridge Road.

Lansing Bailey, remembering this occasion, wrote: "One morning while we were at breakfast, a man came in from the Ridge, telling of the British who had landed from the lake." Bailey continued, "We were well armed. My brother took the first rifle and started out on quick time. I could not go as fast as he, but followed on as fast as my strength would admit. The enemy wanted to steal the Brown's cattle, from near the Bridges, at Carlton."

As the British, under the command of the accused Captain, came up the stream, it was told, they spotted some trees loaded with wild plums. Wild plums are ripe in July. Fresh fruit became of more interest to the plunderers than dispatching settlers, and the Captain had himself put ashore. According to the story, he had his men proceed upstream to take observations and return.

The Captain was alone and found himself quickly captured. He was taken to the nearest house where widow Brown was waiting. This lady was certainly of the character who was able to take charge in time of stress or emergency. She recognized her enemy as the one who caused so much difficulty years earlier - and during her questioning, refreshed his memory of his past evil deeds. Widow Brown's sons, proposed to deliver the Captain to American forces who they said were reported to be traveling from Oswego to Niagara along the Ridge route.

Legend tells us this put enough fear into the Captain that he begged to be allowed to return to his ship. Our "Lady of the House" went into consultation with her neighbors and announced that even if they might have the Captain executed, she did not want the responsibility - and if he would indeed promise to return, with his men, to his ship, and never again return to the Oak Orchard vicinity, she would allow him to depart without injury. The prisoner gladly accepted the conditions of release. Our legend does not tell if he was ever heard from again.

Our heroine lived to be 71 years old. Her name turned up again when Carlton, then called Oak Orchard, was setting out the first road districts and her lands were being used as various boundaries. Bathshua Brown lived in a generation when the names of women were seldom recorded. The historic marker dedicated on Oct. 7 at Brown's Berry Patch will be a fitting and lasting memorial to her fortitude, strength of character, and love of life on the new frontier.