

## The Preston Family of Galway, New York - Alan Maddaus

The book, Galway 1900-1949 A Photographic History, mentions my childhood home in Galway and renewed my interest in it. Formerly known to me as the Brundige house, it is located on East Street between the Baptist and Catholic churches.



The Preston house, September 1950

The house was built for Dr. and Mrs. Calvin Preston by George Hanford, in 1838 for the sum of “one thousand dollars lawful money of the United States” according to the original title. The doctor was a devout Presbyterian, a factor in the move to Galway village from Antwerp, NY in 1830 as the Church in Galway had a thriving congregation with Eliphalet Nott, President of Union College, supplying the pulpit in 1820, and his brother Samuel, serving there until 1829. Dr. Preston’s first wife, Margaret gave birth to 6 of their 7 children in Galway, sadly passing away in 1848 at the age of 43; Dr. Preston’s second wife was Sarah J. Anderson. The Federal census record of 1850 shows Dr. Preston, age 50, wife Sarah 40, and children, ranging in age from 5 to 22 as household members, a total of nine. There were 4 second floor bedrooms, and a nursery, crowded for a family of nine by current standards, but probably considered more than adequate at that time.

Calvin Preston was born in North Gage, Oneida County, NY on February 2, 1799, the fifth of 11 children of Calvin Preston Sr. and wife Rachel Rice Preston. He attended Fairfield Academy receiving a medical degree in 1825. On September 17, 1827 he married Margaret McAllaster of Antwerp, NY. They resided in Antwerp until 1830, when they moved to Galway, occupying the Clizbe house on East St. prior to building their new home.

A community leader as well as a church deacon, the Village incorporation documents of 1838 bear Dr. Preston’s signature. He maintained a medical office in the house; the small, one story shed addition just behind the two story front section was his waiting room. He reportedly maintained a large practice in Galway, but found time to take an extended journey to the Midwest with the Rev. H.L. Grose in 1856, traveling by train to Pittsburgh and then by steamer, owned and operated by his son William, on the Ohio River to the Missouri River, visiting St. Louis prior to his return.

Unfortunately, several years later he was entangled in a lengthy civil action resulting from his habit of kissing woman patients. The husband of one took exception to this behavior, accusing him of sexual assault. Arbitration and three trials followed, one in town court, two at the county level which ended favorably for him. He continued to live Galway and practice medicine until 1877, passing away in 1885. Five years prior to his death, he transferred the property to his daughter Sophia Preston Hays, who lived with her husband John Hays ½ mile east of the village on the farm where Joseph Henry resided in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Sarah Preston occupied the family home until her death in 1893. At that time Sophia was the only one of the seven Preston children remaining in the area, the others having moved to far away locations of Canton, China; Galveston, Texas; and Waitsburg, Washington. Adventurous, energetic and talented, their destinies were influenced by major events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. William, who became the family patriarch, was a founding father and wealthy mill owner in Waitsburg. Eventually siblings and relatives joined him there.

In order of birth year, the Preston children were: Charles Finney (1829), James Edwin (1831), William Goodell (1832), Sophia Jane (1835), Platt Adams (1837), Maria Chapin (1842) and Calvin Walridge (1845). Their destinies were shaped by major events including the Second Great Awakening, China Opium War, Civil War, opening of Nebraska and Northwest Territories, Gold Rushes, Galveston Hurricane of 1900, and growth of legal rights for the mentally disabled.

Charles Finney Preston was named after Charles Grandison Finney, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Presbyterian evangelist who resided in Jefferson, New York. Reverend Finney was a charismatic orator, associated with the Second Great Awakening, a religious movement based on the vision of Jesus Christ's Second Coming. Charles Preston graduated from Union College in 1850, Princeton Theological Seminary in 1853, and was then commissioned missionary to China by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions reaching Hong Kong in May, 1854. Stationed in Canton he spent two years studying the language and during the Second Chinese Opium War found refuge in Macao. In November 1858 he returned to Canton and soon built a chapel from funds raised chiefly by his own efforts, where he preached in fluent Chinese until his final illness. Charles married the widow of a missionary, Mary Brewster, in Canton, China on December 1854 and they had 8 children. He died of a chronic illness in Hong Kong on July 17, 1877 enroute to the United States with his family, leaving them difficult circumstances, had it not been for the resources and commitment of family patriarch, William G. Preston. At the time of Charles' death William resided in Waitsburg, Washington where Mary and six children joined him.

William G. Preston, strongly family and community oriented, was an adventurer and entrepreneur, of remarkable versatility, energy and foresight. Graduated from Galway Academy in 1848, in 1852 Mr. Preston became a sailor and visited large port cities in America and Europe. When the Nebraska Territory opened for settlement in 1854 he travelled there by railway to Chicago, and then by riverboat on the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers to Bellevue, Iowa where in 1855 he was placed in command of a ferryboat. Platt Preston went to Nebraska the same year, at age 17, to assist his brother with the ferry. Following the sale of the boat, William went to Steubenville, Ohio, and built the Omaha City, a side-wheeler, designed to carry freight. When the territorial capital was moved to Omaha he and Platt relocated there and had an interest in the Council Bluffs and Nebraska Ferry Company. In 1857 Platt took charge of the ferry as William began moving freight on the river, until the fall of 1858, when he turned the freight and ferry business over to his brother and journeyed to the future site of Denver, Colorado swept up in the excitement of the Gold Rush. Platt followed him in the spring of 1860, and the brothers remained in Colorado until 1862, when they departed for Elk City, Idaho, site of the next Gold Rush. There, William became involved in freighting supplies to miners, operating a pack train from Fort Walla Walla, Washington, to Lewiston, Idaho, dealing with the threat of nighttime attacks by Native-Americans and moving freight over very difficult terrain, while Platt worked in the mines. The fact that there was money to be made in the supply of essentials to miners was not lost on William and Platt. In 1866 they purchased a half interest in the Washington Flouring Mills, located in Waitsburg, Washington. They became sole proprietors in 1870 and subsequently gained local control of the industry. For a number of years the mills were operated by Preston Brothers and then became the Preston-Schaffer Milling Company which operated until 1957, maintaining mills at multiple locations.

“In 1869, at the age of 37, William G. Preston married Matilda Cox, of an Oregon pioneer family and they became the parents of three sons. Known in the community as Uncle Bill and Aunt Tillie, they lived in opulent style in a dwelling distinguished by a corner turret enclosed with windows to the second story, two parlors, a music room embellished with tile fireplaces and ceiling rosettes of plaster cupids and roses, a small backyard abode the horse trainer and, for a short time, a Chinese cook which was a mark of opulence in that day.” Matilda evidently enjoyed cooking. William was the first mayor of Waitsburg, a director of the Merchant Bank, and a two term member of the territorial legislature. Among other contributions to the community he donated Preston Hall, now the middle school. William died at the home of his son, Charles, in Portland, Oregon on February 20, 1916 at the age of 84. He and Matilda, who died in 1927, are buried in Waitsburg cemetery.

In November 1869, Platt Adams Preston married Laura Jane Billups, the daughter of pioneers, and they raised six children. He was elected mayor of Waitsburg, served in the state senate for four years and was appointed penitentiary commissioner. Platt Preston died at the home of his youngest brother, Calvin, in Galveston, Texas on

March 12, 1900 at the end of a trip to Mexico, in the company of his daughter, seeking a cure for a chronic disease. Platt and his wife Nancy are buried in Waitsburg.

Calvin, age 16 when the Civil War started, joined the 44<sup>th</sup> New York State Volunteer Regiment, aka Ellsworth Avengers in Albany as a drummer, serving from 1861-1864. Drummers had a ceremonial function during parades, a signaling function in battles, served as stretcher bearers for the wounded and helped bury the battlefield dead. The 44<sup>th</sup> was active in some of the most important and bloody battles of the War, including Antietam and Gettysburg. At Gettysburg they were involved in the defense of Little Round Top, fighting alongside Joshua Chamberlain's 20<sup>th</sup> Maine regiment. Calvin's older brother James, a merchant, moved to Galveston in 1855. In 1862 he enlisted in the 26<sup>h</sup> Texas Cavalry, Debray's regiment, Confederate Army which was assigned to protect Texas from invasion by Union forces. After the war he was employed by cotton brokerages as a bookkeeper, married and had two children. James remained in Galveston until his mysterious death in 1870 at the age of 39, of while walking alone on a beach.

Surprisingly, Calvin joined James in Galveston after the war, any hard feelings related to serving on opposing sides during the conflict presumably cast aside. He lived there for 35 years operating a drugstore, achieving the rank of Major in the Texas Militia, and receiving recognition for the heroic rescue of his family during the 1900 Hurricane which claimed 8000 lives. Shortly after James' death he married his widow and they had 4 children. Financially wiped out by the Hurricane he moved his family to Waitsburg, Washington, in 1901 where he worked in William's businesses and served two terms as mayor. He died on June 20, 1905 of pleurisy and is buried in the Waitsburg cemetery.

With William and Platt well established in Waitsburg it is not surprising that a sister, Maria, would follow. The date that she took residence there is unknown, but likely shortly after the opening of the Transcontinental Railway in 1869. Maria Preston married Alexander Stewart in Walla Walla County, Washington in 1885. Alexander was employed as a stock man and Maria as a music teacher. They were wealthy, a circumstance that placed Maria in harm's way later in life.

In 1912, Maria and Alexander travelled to Idaho to stay with family members and then to Miami, Florida. Mr. Stewart died there in November of that year and Maria, who suffered from dementia, was placed in the care of his family. The care provided to her was grossly deficient and knowledge of that caused her brother William to have her removed from the Stewart's guardianship. To achieve this end, he sent an attorney and the attorney's wife to Miami to rescue Maria from deplorable living conditions, handle legal matters, and bring her back to Waitsburg in comfortable stages. The Stewart family contested a change in guardianship and restoration of her title to property, apparently motivated by their desire to control her considerable assets. In 1915 the cases were decided by the Washington Supreme Court in William Preston's favor.

The seven children of Dr. and Mrs. Calvin Preston lived during a turbulent period in US history and were talented, capable, caring and productive. Their eventual re-location to Waitsburg, Washington reflects the influence of patriarch William Preston. What would Galway be like today if William had chosen to stay?