

The life of George Augustus Parsons (1868 – 1926)

As told by his daughter, Bernice Parsons Pollard (1993)

Edited for space by her great niece, Deanna Parsons Simons

George Augustus Parsons, my father, leaves me with happy memories of the years when he was the chief interest in my young life. He was born April 18, 1868, and he married Emma Gordon in 1894.

Dad was a hop and dairy farmer by occupation. He took time to offer his services to organizations that would improve life for people in his county of Schoharie, NY. In 1895, he was elected Justice of the Peace and was re-elected in 1911. He was elected Supervisor of the Town of Sharon in 1910, and held that office until 1917.

In 1917, he was elected Member of the State Assembly, and re-elected in 1918 (Seat #51). While he was in the Assembly, he was placed on two committees – Internal Affairs and Agriculture – a real honor, and he had “a speaking acquaintance with twenty members”. He helped organize the Agricultural College in Cobleskill (SUNY Cobleskill), a “cow college” as some liked to call it. He served on the Board of Trustees, and one of the college dorms carries the name of Parsons Hall.

Dad was interested in starting farmers’ fire insurance company and he helped organize the Sharon, Seward, and Carlisle Cooperative Fire Insurance Company. After that, most farm fires were paid for by this company. Dad had to report to the collector of Internal Revenue.

Dad was interested in starting a Farm Bureau organization to help farmers make a good living from crops and cattle. He was the first Farm Bureau president when Ray F. Pollard came to Schoharie County to live and to work as the “Farm Bureau Man”.

Dad was treasurer for the Sharon Dutch Reformed Church. Mother counted the money and kept the books. Church collections were often insufficient to cover weekly needs and Dad would have to subsidize the pastor with money or food.

The Sunday school was very important to my father and he accepted the position of Sunday School Superintendent. He loved children and I can remember him leading up in the song “Open up your windows, open wide your doors, and let the blessed sunshine in” as he conducted the opening service. Our family rode to church in the “surrey with the fringe on top”.

When Dad went to the bank to deposit the church money, he always wore a good suit and his derby hat. Dad was a hop and dairy farmer. Late in summer he would be at home to keep an eye on the gathering and drying of hops. The heat and sulphur he used to dry the hops was more than most people could stand but he raked the crop in his bare feet in order to get it dry and ready to bale for the hop market. He also kept his eyes nightly on romantic pickers who should have been in bed getting their sleep for another day in the hop yards.

Dad was a good butcher too. In order to feed a family of ten all year, and the hop pickers in season, he killed one beef and four hogs. They were stored in a cold cellar until dad could get them cut up in pieces and Mother could get them canned, pickled in large earthenware gars, or smoked in that little house out back. This house was once a toilet but its seats were removed, the building was scrubbed and it became a smoke house where meats like ham and bacon got their good flavor. Mother was remembered for her delicious canned pork tenderloin too. Dad’s sons who attended an agricultural college (Cornell University) were home on vacation and since it was butchering time they asked if they could show their skills. The mess they made of the butchering disgusted Dad and he never gave them a second chance.

Dad was very sociable and our house was open to many. Our pastor served two parishes and he felt free to stop any time to be fed or even housed for the night. Three of our Sharon High School staff slept more than one night under our roof and partook of Mothers' good meals. Mother ran the farm while Dad was away. She missed him very much and I will never forget her hiding in the pantry when he came home for a week and how he searched for her and their warm and loving kiss when she was found.

Dad liked to be well informed on country life. He was the only one in our neighborhood who took a daily newspaper. He subscribed to the American Agriculturist, The Saturday Evening Post, and any other agricultural report he could find. He took the Ladies Home Journal for Mother. It was easy for him to visit with people from any walks of life.

Dad took over the caring for his father who lived with us in a room called the nursery. Grandfather would get a spell of lying on his back in bed at night. All of a sudden, he would start yelling and my father would have to go downstairs through very chilly rooms and turn him over so that everyone could get back to sleep. As long as he lived, Grandpa sawed up wood for his own stove and considered it a privilege. Wood stoves were the only kind of stoves farmers had. We had at least six to heat that big house.

In my bedroom at night after all the kerosene lamps had been turned down, I could hear Dad and Mother, who always slept together, talking of their plans and problems, laughing or serious, and then several short sweet kisses and "good night". How I wished I could be so lucky someday to have all that makes marriages so wonderful – then I left for Slumber land.

Dad liked to give Mother gifts. There was a beautiful box with a pair of kid gloves. There were boxes of candy: one kind was a Whitman's Sampler and I still find it in the market. There was a silk umbrella that deteriorated in a corner of the front hallway. She had no use for it because we always rode to church in the "surrey with the fringe on top". I still have the cut glass cream and sugar set he gave to show his love. A wide porch was added to the house from the door to the winter kitchen on around the corner of the house. The ladies from the Dutch Reformed Church saw it as a gathering spot for their strawberry shortcake and ice cream festival. My Mother on the night of the party, baked all of the baking powder biscuits for the shortcake and others brought homemade ice cream. People brought their lanterns and Dad helped them hang them around the porch for light. The first night was a great success.

Life ahead looked very promising but then we found trouble in store for us. Dad's health began to give him pain. A doctor's examination advised surgery in a hospital without delay. Dad was our mainstay and how could we live without his weekly visits? All of a sudden, we realized he was selling all of his cows. There was only one cow left behind on those green pastures and she was lame. She moored and moored all night long.

Dad's funeral was held in his church, the Dutch Reformed Church. The funeral procession from the church rode past the farm on the way to the Leesville Cemetery. Dad's favorite pony stood with her head hanging over the wooden bar of the gate. She seemed to realize that he was gone, but not forgotten.