

(B-2217-23)
M. C. Furlong

Mrs. J. S. Casement

*Reprinted from
The Painesville Telegraph
Monday, August 17, 1928*



Mrs. J. S. Casement, who died at her home, Jennings Place, on the night of August 24, in her eighty-ninth year, was Painesville's oldest active citizen. Born Frances Marion Jennings, she was the daughter of Charles C. Jennings and Mehetabel M. Park and the widow of Gen. J. S. Casement. Her grandparents, Oliver and Jerusha Jennings, moved from Vermont in 1784 to Ontario county, New York, whence they came to Painesville in 1820. Her father was born in Vermont in 1809 and her mother in Mendon, Monroe county, New York, in 1814.

Charles C. Jennings was a pioneer farmer and a leading citizen of Lake county from early manhood until the day of his sudden death at Jennings Place in 1876. He was exceptionally active in all civic and political affairs, looking to the advancement of his community and the state and took prominent part in organizing and promoting the agricultural interests. Always a militant fighter for righteousness, he was a powerful opponent of slavery during the years preceding the Civil war and a staunch supporter of President Lincoln and the cause of the Union during that conflict.

His daughter Frances was born in a one-room log cabin on the North Ridge three miles east of Painesville. With the exception of some years spent in Omaha, Nebraska, while her husband, Gen. Casement was building the Union Pacific railroad, two years in Kansas and six years in San Jose, Costa Rica, while the General was engaged in the construction of a railroad from the capital of that republic to the Pacific coast, practically her entire life was passed on the well known farm "across the river," to which she came with her parents at the age of two.

She was the mother of three sons, of whom only the youngest, Dan Dillon, survives, the

first, Charles Jennings, having died in his fifth year and the second, John Frank, at the age of 19. She left three grandchildren, Mary, Frances and Jack.

Mrs. Casement survived her husband by more than 18 years, his death occurring in 1909, some two years after the celebration of their golden wedding anniversary.

Living as she did continuously, with minor interruptions, for 86 years on the same farm, her affections were deeply rooted in its soil and her interest in the entire surrounding community and all that pertained to its welfare and progress was constant and endured to the last.

Among the people of Painesville who had always known her, she was universally respected for her courage and sound common sense and sincerely loved for the simplicity and strength of her nature and for the depth of her human sympathy and rare understanding of life.

Her life spanned nearly nine decades of our country's most eventful years. She experienced the stormy times and stirring scenes incident to four wars and for four strenuous years knew all the anxieties of a gallant soldier's wife.

The urge of her strong Puritan blood led her to the forefront of all the pioneer movements of her time in the direction of political and social progress. She helped to organize and served as first president of the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association, of which she was honorary president at the time of her death. She was the close friend and trusted confidant of such noble women as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and many other national leaders in the fight to obtain equal rights for women in America.

In the prohibition movement she served untiringly from its inception with the "Crusade" of the early seventies, which ingenuously aimed to cure the evil of drink by spiritual regeneration through prayer, to the political battle which placed the Eighteenth Amendment in the Constitution. She sub-

scribed to that measure as sound law and was all poised and ready to fight in its defense in the present national campaign.

In the cause of education for women she not only worked ceaselessly for its advancement but also gave unsparingly of herself and her means to help many girls through school or college and to open wider opportunities for them.

Her whole heart despised evil but often spread a mantle of pity, broad tolerance and kindly sympathy over the individuals who practiced it. The motive forces of her life were love and service and, impelled by these, her truly catholic nature could tolerate no prejudice of class or comprehend any differences in creeds.

She retained a youthful spirit through her unflaging, eager interest in life. She loved and profoundly understood young people and, though they might chafe at the seemingly stern precepts which pointed her philosophy, added years and closer contacts with her invariably gave them a clear view and keen appreciation of its real worth and wisdom.

Copied among her notes were found these lines expressive of her happy outlook on life:

"Age is a quality of mind;
If you have left your dreams behind,
If hope is cold,
If you no longer look ahead,
If you ambitions' fires are dead,
Then you are old.

But if from life you take the best,
And if in life you keep the jest—
If love you hold,
No matter how the years go by,
No matter how the birthdays fly,
You are not old."

If the true success and merit of any human life are correctly measured by the extent and inspiring quality of its reaction on other lives, certainly the life of Frances Jennings Casement was a very complete success.

* * *

It had evidently been Mrs. Casement's intention to write for her grandchildren a short sketch of her life, for, among her papers

were found the following penciled notes under date of April 23, 1917. It is unfortunate that her purpose was not carried out. The uncompleted sketch depicts only her earliest years. It is printed here because of the vivid picture it presents of a pioneer childhood, for the few facts of local historical interest it contains and because the story is told in a simple and direct style peculiarly her own:

* * *

"On this date I arrive at my seventy-seventh birthday and I believe that my grandchildren will be pleased to have me make some notes of my life, that in years to come they may have a little story of their grandparents. When they are older and are men and women with their own families around them, they will care more for it than at present.

"I was born in the year 1840, April 23rd, on a farm east of the Storrs and Harrison Nursery. It has all my life been known as the Raphael Marshall farm. Now, in 1917, it is in possession of Mr. Raphael Marshall's daughter, Mrs. Louise Marshall Lincoln and her husband, Mr. Lincoln. I do not know how many years my father owned this farm, but he sold it to the Marshalls in 1840. A log house on the north side of the North Ridge road was the farm house. Mr. Marshall with his bride occupied this house and my parents moved to another log house of but one room (with a shed-kitchen attached) which was on the south side of the farm near where the school house and chapel now stand.

"It was in February, 1840 that my father bought the farm now known as Jennings Place. The land belonged to a Mr. Storrs—Col. Storrs he was called — at that time counted a very wealthy man. This tract of land of 400 acres, I believe was sold at sheriff's sale. I have never known what my father paid per acre. Afterwards he sold off about 100 acres, I think, leaving a farm

of 300 acres. This was a dense forest. The land was cleared by cutting the trees, then burning them in pits, and the charcoal went to Geauga Furnace, which was across the Grand River just opposite our house. A few acres—enough to raise some crops — were cleared; a frame house of one and one-half stories was built and, when I was two years and a few months old, I came to this new home. Our family moved from the house which now stands near the diagonal crossing and is occupied by Mr. Levi Mason. There we had lived for a short time after leaving the log house on the Marshall farm.

"On the newly purchased farm, in clearing space to build a house, to make gardens, build barn, etc., my father had left many of the original forest trees. A rail fence was in front of the house, protecting the yard from the road, and, to get over this fence, a strong plank went up one side, another plank down the opposite side. This was making a home in a new country, and I know that my father and mother cheerfully and hopefully worked together, anticipating the enjoyment there would be in this home.

"My mother has told me that, during these years of hard work, and pleasant anticipations, her delight was to go occasionally for a day with my father in the woods, bringing her chair, her baby and her work and, with a lunch, spend the day while he was felling trees, building and watching coal pits as they burned.

"In this house my happy, contented childhood was passed. The yard at the front and side of the house was shaded by many of the forest trees. Across the road the river bank was a real woods. Under these trees and at the roots of them I built my play-houses. With the soft green moss gathered anywhere about the yard I made imaginary sofas, beds, etc., and to me the parlors and rooms that I made in those play-houses were quite as elegant as those of modern houses today. My china-closet was filled with bits of beautiful china, picked up where they had

been thrown out, when some person had broken a dish—often times one of the best china set.

“On the back part of the farm was some wet, swampy land and a piece of woods—a lovely place for the geese, of which my mother had a large flock of beautiful grey ones, and, as I grew older and larger, it was one of my chores to go out late in the afternoon and drive the flock of geese to the barnyard. Blackberry bushes grew in these undrained back lots and many pails-full of fine blackberries that we loved so much, were gathered there. In winter some years, these lots and the woods that adjoined them would be flooded in places, making large ponds, which when covered with ice, were fine for skating and sliding.

“East of the house my father planted an apple orchard. I do not know the number of trees, but to me it seemed immense, and the bushels and bushels of fine luscious apples that it produced were truly wonderful. There were Rhode Island Greenings, Baldwins, Northern Spys, Crows Eggs, etc. When the present house was built much of this orchard was taken out. South of the house currant bushes and cherry trees were on each side of a lovely path that led from the house to the barn. This was a home for cat-birds and thrushes that gave us plenty of sweet music. There always was plenty of fruit for many friends and neighbors.

“My father—as did many others in those days—during the winter months made trips to the south and other parts of the country for the purpose of engrafting fruit trees, roses, etc. When he was on those trips my mother cared for what stock there might be, with the help of one hired man. These trips helped out the pocketbook and went far toward paying expenses.

“When I became of age to go to school, it was to the District School I went. The school house was near the river at the foot of the hill where we cross the bridge going west. It is all so changed now. At that time there

was no railroad nor railroad bridge but two or three acres of land covered with beautiful maple trees. The River road, as we then called it, was laid through this grove and led on down the river—a lovely walk and drive. Our school house stood at the edge of this grove. In this school I learned to read and afterwards went on with writing, spelling, geography and arithmetic. The latter I did not like very well, but never will I forget when my mind and brain opened to the understanding of long division.

“The years in that first school were joyous ones. There were writing teachers who went through some of the districts teaching and we would have four or six weeks of writing school, meeting at the school house in the evening, each scholar bringing his own candle—a homemade tallow candle. Then there were spelling schools when two or three districts met together, ‘chose sides and spelled down.’ I was a good speller, trained well at home in reading and spelling during the long winter evenings, and these spelling classes and contests were exciting for me. An afternoon once in two weeks would be given to speaking pieces and reading a school paper or compositions of some older pupils. This was a large school, for the families of Geauga Furnace workers were in our district. In later years there were two rooms in the school house and two teachers. Pupils in winter numbered eighty and sometimes more.

“I was about twelve years old when I went for a year to the Painesville Academy. The building was where one of the Grammar schools now stands. This was before the union school system was established.

“In the winter of 1855-56 I was a pupil at Willoughby Female Seminary. During the winter term the Seminary building burned. My class finished the term of school studying in our rooms and reciting in rooms in the Boarding Hall. The school building, which was built and first occupied as a Medical college stood where the schoolhouse now

stands. The Boarding Hall was down on the main street of the village. While in Willoughby I boarded with Mr. and Mrs. Lord Sterling, who kept a house-full of girls—a home ever popular with the school-girls—and we all loved 'Pa' and 'Ma' Sterling, as they were called by the girls who lived with them."

* * *

Here ends her own narrative. Had it been continued it would have told, doubtless, of the building of the Lake Shore railroad, the track of which was laid through the farm some three hundred yards north of the farmhouse.

The progress of its construction brought into the life of the farmer's sixteen-year-old daughter a young man who had charge of the ballast crew and work-train. His parents had come to America from the Isle of Man in 1828, a few months before his birth, and had finally settled near Ann Arbor, Michigan. From his earliest boyhood he had worked on the new railroads, which were rapidly taking the place of the stage coach throughout the country, beginning as a waterboy. Later he turned his hand to almost every task connected with the construction and operation of this new means of transportation from the arduous labor of driving spikes to the dignified duties of a chief executive.

As his acquaintance with the young girl of the farm-house progressed, she waved to him shy greetings as his train shuttled back and forth at its work and often her duties appeared to call her opportunely to the well in the yard as his train was passing.

"Jack, that is surely the dryest girl I've ever seen," a man of the train crew is said to have remarked to the young track-boss on one of these occasions.

Probably, had her narrative continued, it would have made no mention of this somewhat apocryphal incident, for, in later years, mention of its always evoked an indignant

but blushing denial. She was married at the age of seventeen.

It would have been interesting to have in her own words an account of her belated wedding trip in the late fifties by steamboat up the Missouri River and by stage coach across the rolling prairies of "bleeding Kansas," covered with their wealth of June flowers.

Later, the stirring events of the Civil war left deep impress on her life. At first, reluctant to hear the clear call of duty that summoned her husband to the battlefield, when their honeymoon had scarcely waned, she soon rivaled the storied Spartan mother in sheer militancy and her soldier at the front always had the encouragement of her heroic readiness to sacrifice her all to the cause for which he fought. During these anxious years she bore and buried her first child.

She could have told a rare story of her life on the western frontier during the construction of the first transcontinental railroad, when her husband was often as much endangered by Indian arrows as in the great conflict he had been menaced by Confederate bullets.

She could have thrown innumerable illuminating sidelights on many of the important events which transpired during the past three score years and, had she carried out her intention to write for her grandchildren a brief biography, it is safe to say that her life would have been revealed therein with the same straightforward directness, beauty and unassuming modesty with which it was lived.

Judged by any right standard she was a splendid woman, a devoted wife, an inspiring mother and a truly great human soul.