

# Transcription from: Caroline Smith Page

## Family Papers, 1780-2001

“Autobiography of Caroline Smith Page Class of 1845, Albany State Normal School,”  
[typescript by J. Paul Ward], October 31, 1905  
[UA-802.008](#): Box 1, Folder 1

### AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF CAROLINE SMITH CLASS OF 1845 ALBANY STATE NORMAL SCHOOL

Reminiscences written at the request of some of my grandchildren who have heard me relate some of my experience.

I was born in the village of Spencertown, Columbia County, New York State on November 30th, 1823. This present date is October 3 1905 consequently in one month I shall be 82 years of age.

"There is a Divinity that shapes our ends rough hew them how we will."

And I think I see the Divine Hand leading me all the way through, thus far, and I am sure He will be with me to the end--

My maternal grandfather was a scotchman John McIntyre by name. He came from Scotland about the time of the Revolutionary War to the West Indian Islands with his uncle who owned a plantation on the Islands--as Havana and the surrounding country at that time was in the possession of England, I think his plantation must have been in that vicinity.

In one of the troublous times on the Island they were driven off from the plantation, and grandfather came to this country to the state of New York to Chenango (?), Greene County where he married my grandmother Abigail Jackson. Two children were born, my uncle John McIntyre and Alice McIntyre my mother. My grandfather received word from Scotland that his eldest brother had died and he had fallen heir to the estates in Scotland and for him to come home and look after them.

He took [a] ship bound for Scotland for the purpose of claiming his own and looking after the business. But the vessel he was on, was captured by a privateer and brought back into New York. It was in time of the revolutionary war, and there was danger on the high seas continually, from the pirates and privateers. Before there was a time that it was safe to cross the ocean my grandfather died. At the time of his death my mother was four years old. My grandmother married again a man named Hoyt. There were Hoyt children. My Aunt Annie who married Lockwood, and Aunt Ruth who was younger. We in these days of rapid transit know little about the difficulties of travel in those days, when they had to trust to wind and tide and so we have to be charitable, and not blame people for not doing what we might have thought their duty. I do not know how long my grandfather lived after he was captured and brought back. No doubt [he]

would have gone again, if it had been possible. No one ever blamed him. In those days it took six weeks or more to cross the ocean.

My father William Smith and his brother John were born in Rye, Westchester County, N.Y. It is a historic place. Rye Beach is now a noted resort at this time, but more than a century has passed since those two little boys were born there, and were left orphans there, to the mercies of a cold and selfish world. They had no kindred there. There was property left. I do not know how much, there must have been something worth while. For an old farmer adopted them and took the property and agreed to educate them. They were sent to school enough to learn to read and write but that was all the education they got except to work the old man's farm. They were too young to do much when they were left. I never heard my father complain of him except that he ought to have let him go to school more.

My father loved his children. I remember how he dandled us on his knees, and would sing to us and he could sing. Old Silver Street was his favorite hymn. I was sent to boarding school. I taught school when I was but fourteen family school--from that I taught District school. At the age of twenty I attended The Albany State Normal College the first year that it was opened. In two weeks after entering, Miss Elizabeth G. [H]ance and myself were chosen as assistants in the college. There was a class of 36 that graduated that first year in '45 and Miss [H]ance and I were among the graduates. After graduating I taught in the City of Troy four years. My labors were excessive, with nearly one hundred pupils and only one assistant--in the public schools. My throat began to be affected and I wanted a change. D.P. Page the first Pres. of New York State Normal had died, and George R. [Per]kins the former Professor of Mathematics was now President of the Normal.

Judge Dubuisson Pres. of Natchez Board of Education wrote Pres. Perkins for a lady teacher in the highest department of the Natchez Institute and Pres. Perkins recommended me, and I accepted the situation.

Now I was to start out anew in the world. I never had been out of the state of New York. I had been to New York City but now was to go more than a thousand miles from home. It was a serious matter.

That was the early days of Rail Roads. It was 1849. There was a Rail Road from Albany to Buffalo and I took it. From Buffalo I crossed Lake Erie to Detroit. At Detroit took the cars [?] across the state of Michigan to St. Joseph a little town on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, and crossed the lake from that point to Chicago. From Chicago to LaSalle by canal; now we can go from Albany to Chicago without changing cars. Then there were no Rail Roads around the Southern shores of the lakes. From LaSalle we were to travel by river the rest of the way. There we met Miss North who had been a teacher in the Natchez Institute for some years, and was returning from her vacation to resume her duties as a teacher. I was glad indeed to meet her. I think she was thirtyfive years old, but she was such a good chaperone, and she knew all about the school and she took me with her to her boarding place. But I am getting ahead too fast. I want to speak of the trip down the River. On the small boat there was a fellow with a violin and at night when one wanted to sleep it was so doleful to hear "Away down on Suwanee river ["] "every where I roam" and "old Kentucky home," and made me so homesick to hear it over and over

again. But when we got to St. Louis it was a different affair. We changed boats at St. Louis. Large fine boats plied between St. Louis and New Orleans. We had to wait though sometimes four days before they would be loaded ready to start.

I learned on the boats what a bit and what two bits meant. I had never learned before. But we got started and then began a new experience seeing the negroes "wood up" at night. They use wood or did then to run their engines. And where they stopped at the wood yards, were great fires on top of great pyres of wood, lighting up the whole forest of trees, and 25 or 30 black men stripped to their waists singing and working in unison bringing the wood on board the boat. You all know what fine voices colored folks and these at night and in the stillness of the forest, and in the beauty of the illuminated trees, it was something to be enjoyed. It took three days to go down the river. The scenery is monotonous but the ever recurring islands in the river with their trees and shrubs give variety. The large boats were nicely furnished, like a parlor, good carpets and sofas and rockers, you sit at your ease. It was not as tiresome as traveling on cars for you could walk about at your leisure, and watch the current of the river. It is a powerful stream, the father of waters, moving at the rate of over four miles an hour. There are so many bends in the river that the length is three times what a straight line would be.

The day of our arrival, among others at Mrs. Stewart's table, I met for the first time the man who was to be my beloved companion for forty-two years.

I engaged board with Mrs. Stewart's cousin Mrs. Bums who lived near her, while I taught in the Natchez Institute. I had very pleasant accommodations, and servants to do every thing. I was the only boarder, and Mrs. Bums & myself were congenial companions.

I did not find the work or the associate teachers altogether agreeable in the Institute. I had the offer of a situation in a ladies seminary as preceptor in the city and accepted it. An Episcopal School, I enjoyed two years of teaching in this school much. In the mean time the principal of the school Mrs. Evans was prosecuting a claim against the government at Washington due to her grandfather since the Revolutionary war. A Mr. Bone lawyer who had a daughter in Mrs. Evan's school was prosecuting the claim for her.

Mrs. Evan's grandfather De Neufirille fitted out ships in the time of the revolutionary war for this government. There is no doubt about the legality of the claim for Dr. Franklin in his Life of Franklin gives a full account of the country's dealings with old man De Neufirille and calls him an old jew. Mrs. Evan's father was a frenchman named Linsee but her mother was the daughter of old man De Neufirille, through whom this property came and the ships were fitted out in Holland both for the general government and for South Carolina. She got a large claim from South Carolina that from the general government. The claim from the government was \$60,000. During the first vacation that Mrs. Evans was in Washington, Mr. & Mrs. Nash and myself took our summer vacation and went home. Mr. & Mrs. Nash were natives of New York City.

We went by way of Niagara Falls on our return. Mrs. Nash took with her a young French lady from N.Y. City as teacher of the French language. Perhaps I have not mentioned that they were both Professors of music Mr. & Mrs. Nash

We were to return and open the school in the fall. Mrs. Evans was still in Washington. WE returned early and before it was time to open the school we were all taken with the Dengue - all four of us Mr. & Mrs. Nash the French teacher and myself.

Those black people took care of that house, and took care of the sick ones just as well as though as if their mistress was at home. They were paid for it or were obliged to do it. They have hearts just as white as any body.

Mrs. Evans wished me to go on with the school after she got her claim. [She] wanted me to take all the responsibility, without increasing my salary. But I told her no, if I had double duty I must be paid accordingly. I did not want all that labor any way. I did not have to wait a day to find a good position. And so I went to the plantation next i.e., Mr. Alexander Boyd's family and it has ever been a pleasant memory, the good friends they proved to be.

On Saturdays we had no school and we would (that is the daughters of the family and myself) go on horse back to see one of the married sisters or one of the aunts or some relative. Sometimes we would stay over Sunday. They gave me the privilege of riding Willie's horse (pony).

You know how rail fences are built, the riders [?] at the corners, every other one would throw [a] shadow across the road, when it was moonlight and the pony would jump every one of those shadows, as though some obstacle was in the way. When Mrs. Boyd heard of that she was not willing that I should be out by moonlight with that pony. The South is very different from the north in regard to roads. The plantations are very large. One plantation containing a thousand acres, often more consequently we had to drive through the fields. So we always had a black boy to accompany us to open gates for us.

This was the time of slavery, but there was no whipping of slaves on that plantation. Not so on a plantation adjoining the Boyd plantation. The crack of the whip was heard every day a half mile away. The man's name was Leslie.

One morning early a little after daylight on looking our my window I saw a black man (with a turbaned head) on horse back riding with the utmost speed, across the fields in a straight line toward the house. I know that something serious had happened.

When I went down to breakfast I learned that one of Mr. Leslie's servants had killed his master (Southerners never called the slaves slave they always called them servants). Mr. Leslie had his men out at three o'clock in the morning cutting timber by moonlight. The man came behind his master and killed him with an axe.

Mr. Boyd said "It is what I have been looking for this long time. No human beings could endure such cruelty as has been practices on that place without retaliating". The man gave himself up [and] said he wanted to die. He had killed his master to save his brethren from such cruelties as they had had to endure.

I went with the family to attend the funeral at Leslie's house. The women servants were seen going up and down stairs with chains on their feet, while that man lay in his coffin.

A system that would allow such things in this free country should have been condemned long before it was.

No man should be given the power that the southern planter had over his slaves. All the kind masters in the country could not excuse the system.

Mr. Boyd was called to be an appraiser of the property after Leslie's death, and he said the slave property was not worth as much by a third as it would have been, if the servants had been well treated. They had lost an eye or a hand, or were maimed or crippled by the cruel treatment they had received.

The slave who had killed his master was tried and found guilty, he must be made an example of, he was condemned and incarcerated in the Natchez jail.

But all my Natchez friends were of the same opinion, that the man would never be hung. They said Leslie's cruelties to his slaves was too well known and that he had been the cause of the death of more than one of his slaves.

One morning the man was missed from the jail, and I do not think there was ever any attempt to find him.

There were a number of Northern teachers in Natchez, some of them often met at Mrs. Stewart's. Some of the teachers boarded there. A few days after I arrived there I went to hear one of their Southern political speakers, and he told how downtrodden the Factory hands in New England were, and made their condition worse than that of the negroes. I was asked what I thought of the speech and I told them plainly that it was not true. Why said I those girls are intelligent girls. They publish a paper of their own. They have libraries, and they study and some of them have pianos and take music lessons. Somebody said I had not got the sharp edges worn off yet. I suppose they meant that I would hear so much of that talk, that my feelings would get blunted after a while.

In the summer of 1852 I went home and on Sept. 7 I was married to Stephen R. Page who was a teacher of young men, he taught the classics [and] prepared young men for college. He was a graduate of Union College, Schenectady N.Y.

He had been teaching in Natchez three years before I went there. We returned to Natchez after we were married, and Mr. Page continued teaching there two years longer. On the 22nd of June 1853 following, our first and only son was born.

We liked the climate of Mississippi it agreed with us, and we had many friends but we knew we could never make a home in the south on account of slavery. We knew that we would never own a slave. And my husband wanted to come north that vacation and make some arrangement about a house in the north. He was not willing to leave me and the boy in Natchez for fear that the fever might visit the place, so he went out to see if Mrs. Boyd would take me and the boy to board for six weeks while he was gone. The township was Kingston and it was almost twelve miles from Natchez. It must have been the second week in August 1853 when I went to the

country and my husband took a boat for Illinois. Before he left we arranged as to what points I should write him and at what dates and he would write regularly. In three days we learned the Yellow Fever scourge had broken out in New Orleans, and soon it was in Natchez, and the cities were quarantined. We had not calculated on the fever coming to Natchez but we were prepared for it. And then how the days dragged and I heard nothing. I knew that we could not expect mails. But oh the pity of it. We could hear from Natchez, and learned what ravages the fever was making more and more were dying every day. You wonder how the news could come. Not through letters for that would mean contact. But there were many [?]. They could give the news by work of mouth from one to another until it reached miles into the country and we heard every day but what we heard brought no comfort. I lost flesh every day. One of the Boyd girls said to me, what will you do if Mr. Page does not come back? I said he will come back if he is alive. I was as sure of that, as that I was a living woman. But I said if he does not come back, I shall know that he can not, and I shall go home. The servants did all the work, but I drew patterns on counterpanes, new patterns for the ladies in the family to work, to embroider. At that time the subject of slavery was beginning to be agitated, the fugitive slave law had been passed, and northern people most of them, disliked to capture and return their runaway slaves, which the new law required them to do. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had been published. I had nothing to say about slavery while in the south unless I was asked. It would do no good with those who were the most rabid, it would stir up anger. After I was married, the last two years of our stay in Natchez we boarded at Dr. Stones. One day Mrs. Stone asked me if I had read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. I said I had not. That many northern people were opposed to stirring up strife in any way. Well Mrs. Stone said ["I have read it, and it is every word true."] I read it after that, I wanted to know the truth. I found that there were others who believed the same, and I found by experience that it was true by my knowledge of Leslie's treatment of his slaves. Mrs. Boyd said to me that the old colored preachers were prophesying that there would be war between the North and the South, and the slaves would be freed and "the preachers said it will be in our day." Mr. Boyd said to me once, the south will own Washington yet and govern the country. He said only southern men were capable, there were no men in the [?] with [the] leisure to give to the government of the country. I would not argue with him. I only told him that he was mistaken, that their Southern men were mostly sent North to be educated. He had no education. He had native ability, and was looked up to by all the planters around. In any difficulty he was the first man sent to. He was rich and had made it all by his own exertions. He owned a large plantation and four hundred negroes in Mississippi and he had another plantation in Louisiana on the Tensas river.

Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Swasey were married daughters. I will not weary you with more details only I will say that Mrs. Boyd, and Mrs. Robinson, and Sue were unionists, and Mrs. Sinah Swasey was a 'simon pure' rebel all in the James [?] family. She would not have a pattern on her counterpane with Union emblems.

Well I lived through the absence of my dear husband. I had written to him at St. Louis, to not come through Natchez on his return for they were still dying there at the rate of twenty three a day, in the small city of 5 or 6 thousand, but for him to stop at Quitman's Landing about twenty miles above Natchez, and come out through the country to Kingston to the Boyd plantation. And he got that letter *Thank Heaven*. And just six weeks from the day he left, he reached that plantation safe and sound and well. He stopped at Quitman's Landing hired a horse and black

boy with another horse to take his horse back. And when that circumstance comes to my mind, I can see him coming as I saw him then on that white horse riding through the grove.

Now my trouble was all over. But the anxiety had made me nearly sick. The day before he came I received the first letter that he wrote me and mailed at Vicksburg. It states that all were well on the boat and very few passengers on board. His letters all came to me finally, and we were obliged to stay in the country and the Quarantine was not raised before the last of October.

On the last week of June 1854 we left Natchez and never returned. I remember well that my baby's birthday came while we were on the boat, and it kept his father and me both busy watching him for fear he would be drowned. He was one year old on the 22nd of June 1854 and his name was Henry Lawrence Page. He ran so fast, and would dodge through the state rooms so quickly that we had to be very watchful.

We made our first home in the north in Chicago. My husband built a brick house on Prairie Avenue, in the summer of 1855. We [were] there four years, when his partner in business died, and he sold out, because he had always been in education work before going in with Mr. Fernald in the flour and feed business, and Mr. Fernald had done the buying and he would [not] trust himself to buy because [of] his lack of experience.

He bought 40 acres of ground in Champaign, Champaign, Illinois and built a house on it, making a home where we expected to end our days, but it was ordered otherwise. One daughter was born in Chicago, two daughters born in Champaign. We lived in Champaign eight years, when my husband's health began to fail. The doctors told him that he must leave Champaign if he expected to prolong his days. We sold our home, and went east that summer 1867 and visited my parents in New York State and my husband's Father (his mother had died some years before) in Haverhill, New Hampshire.

We spent a part of the summer there, and in August we arrived in Boone, Iowa where a sister was living. I stopped with her with my little family while my husband went to look the ground over, to see if he could find a desirable and healthy place to dwell in. He went to Kansas and traveled the country over considerably and made particular inquiries about the health of the country. He traveled some on horse back but heard nothing favorable about the health of the country. He said one day he saw a man leaning over some bars, and spoke with him asked what sort of country it was. The man seemed perfectly lifeless and so indifferent that he felt a little impatient with him. And spoke rather sharply to him saying to him, ["What is the matter with you, you act as though you had no life in you?"] Well he said "That is true, I have little life left. I came out here six years ago with my wife and family bought this farm, and went to work. Before we had been here a year some of the family had chills then others took them and one of the children dies, then another until they all died from malaria and last my wife died and I am alone." And then father thought it was no wonder the man seemed lifeless. And he also thought this country does not attract me and I do not want to live here. Then he wrote me asking if we could arrange to spend the winter in Boone and I answered, "Oh yes we will never stop in a malarial country, we left Champaign on account of malaria." We decided that Boone might be as good a place as any to live in, and we built a house that Fall and moved into it and were happy. Boone was a little Burg then only two years old. And we lived there twenty eight years and helped to build up the town

and the schools. No man did more for the Public Schools than my husband your grandfather the twenty eight years that we lived there. He was secretary of the School Board twenty years of that time. He was County Supervisor several years. In matters of Education he was Superior. He was a trustee of Simpson College for many years. The other trustees said he was specially helpful in regard to the curriculum. He was a scholar a Phi Beta Kappa of Union College Schenectady, NY. Your grandfather united with the M.E. Church soon after we went to Boone and he was a pillar of the church. After forty two years of my married life, your grandfather fell on sleep, "That blessed sleep from which none ever wakes to weep." And since that time it has been a blessed thought to me, that our removal from Illinois was the means of prolonging his life so many years. And those blessed years of usefulness unrequited and his happiest years.

I am thankful that Boone did honor him by naming a school building for him after he had passed away, but I sometimes wish they had shown their appreciation before.

It makes no difference, the faithful are sure of their reward. I pray I may be faithful and true as was he. I know that I am a better woman for having his companionship so many happy years. I had much sympathy from many friends for his loss. Two letters I wish to copy, friends who knew him so well. Because you were all so young when he passed away that you could not appreciate his worth.

One is from Mr. Shepard a Massachusetts man who claimed to be a descendent of Priscilla. Copy letter condolence written to:

Mrs. E. M. Holmes (daughter of S.R.P.) Warren, Mass. Sept. 3, 1894

I have just received a paper The Boone Standard, reporting the death of your Father S.R. Page for which I desire to thank you for kind remembrance. It was my good fortune to meet and to know him for some 6 or 7 years and to know was to respect and admire him for his true and sterling virtues. I kn[e]w him personally and intimately, having roomed and boarded in the same family a year or more.

He and I met as teachers in the Natchez Institute (Natchez, Miss.). Your father was one of the best friends I had, in a life of 7 years in the State of Mississippi. At the end of 7 years I returned to this place of my birth, Warren, Mass.

Again thanking you for sending me for I loved him as a brother.

Yours,

D.W. Shepard