

Who Was Martha **Aldrich**?

By Douglas H. **Shepard**, 2011

In July 2010, the D. R. **Barker** Historical Museum received a generous gift from Mary B. **Sippel**. It was a 'Friendships Album' kept by Miss Martha **Aldrich**. The album is a sumptuously bound volume of blank pages on which friends and relatives were supposed to write expressions of love and caring. Martha kept the album up, beginning in 1865 and extending into 1889. Luckily the large majority of entries are dated, so that even though people skipped around through the volume, it is possible to put most of the entries into chronological order. By doing that, we are able to learn where she was at a particular date, what activities she was involved in and even what she may have been thinking about issues of the day important to her.

Martha **Aldrich** was born on 26 April 1846 in Hamburg, NY, the second daughter of Scott **Aldrich** and his second wife, Anna **Meal**. Eventually she had some thirteen brothers and sisters and half-brothers and half-sisters. In addition, Scott's third wife, Lydia A. **Snell**, added step-daughters Rhetta, 19, and Lottie, 15, to the family at least for the *1860 Census*. Lottie (Charlotte) was still in the **Aldrich** family for the *1865 Census*.

Scott **Aldrich** moved his family to Fredonia in 1857. One of the motivating factors may have been to allow son Nathan to attend the Fredonia Academy which he did in 1859-1860. Martha followed him for two terms in 1864 and 1865. Her more significant membership in Fredonia was in what was then known as the Methodist Episcopal Church. There is a list of members dated 1860-61 with the annotation that Mrs. Lydia A. **Aldrich** had joined by letter on 26 September 1858 and that Martha **Aldrich**, who had been a probationer, was baptized into full membership on 1 June 1862. Other records note that she had "Removed by letter" on 7 April 1863 and returned by letter in August. (When a member was to move, the pastor could grant a request to provide a letter or certificate stating the individual was a member in good standing. That letter then served to admit the individual to the Methodist church in the new location.)

Martha continued as an active member of the Methodist Church while she attended the Fredonia Academy in 1864 and in 1865. It seems obvious that the album was a gift as she was finishing up at the Academy. The earliest signers, on 23 February 1865, were E. S. **Wright** and Lucia E. **Wright**. He was the Rev. Dr. Edwin S. **Wright**, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Fredonia, and he and Mrs. **Wright** were the parents of Martha's young schoolmate, Ormand **Wright**. Five days later she had H. T. **Fuller**, Principal of the Academy, sign, and on 2 March it was Silas M. **Weaver**, a fellow student (1861-1866) as well as a Math instructor in 1864 and 1865. In the following September, she added Felicia A. **Low**, a member of her church and W. D. **Archibold**, her neighbor on Central Avenue. In October, a Helen **Eddy** of Hamburg, NY signed, perhaps a friend from the family's time in Hamburg.

The following March 1866 yielded Rachel **Wright** of Charlotte Center and Ada M. **Aldrich** of Portland. Towards the end of 1866 three more acquaintances, then nothing for five years. In March 1871 Laura **Tagg**, wife of the then Methodist Minister in Fredonia signed at the Parsonage.

Martha's younger sister Maria had married Jasper A. **Aldrich**, a very distant relation, on 11 February 1872. They were living in Edwardsburg, MI where Martha visited them more than once. She had album entries from Guinevere M. **Jackson** in Chicago in July 1873 and George S. **Hicks**, the Methodist Minister in Edwardsburg on 8 April 1876. By December she had returned home, adding C. Z. **Wilner** of Williamsville to her album. In August 1877 it was John W. **Armstrong** and A. B. **Armstrong**, and in November, Elizabeth **Richardson**, all members of the Methodist Church in Fredonia.

By 1878, a pivotal year for her, Martha was teaching advanced class No.16 at her church and very involved in some religious issues that had arisen in the community. The local W.C.T.U. had invited a "gospel Temperance lecturer" named O. D. **Bacon** to speak at a union meeting to be held in the Baptist Church. **Bacon** was himself a reformed alcoholic who often provided lurid descriptions of his own and

others dissipation and ruin. He claimed to be, said the Clerk of the Baptist Church A.Z. **Madison**, “under the immediate control and guidance of the Lord Jesus Christ,” so that no matter what he said it actually came directly from God. Although he shared the platform with the pastors of the Fredonia Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches, “Few, if any, in the audience, but what were shocked from the first, with the harsh declamatory & denunciatory manner of the speaker.”

Bacon continued here, on and off, for ten weeks, causing greater and greater dissension in the community, with past officers of the W.C.T.U., the local clergy, and many temperance advocates withdrawing their support. Most of those who remained **Bacon’s** supporters were women, and one was Martha **Aldrich**.

The Clerk, A. Z. **Madison**, took notes of a 7 March 1878 meeting of the Trustees of the Baptist Church including Chairman Alva **Colburn**. “The Chairman stated the object of this meeting to consider the application of women, represented by his sister Miss **Colburn** & Miss **Aldrich**, to have the Baptist Church opened for lectures by Dr. O. D. **Bacon**.” The Trustees moved that no action be taken then and on 13 March the Trustees of all three churches declined to have **Bacon** meetings continue in their buildings. Union Hall (at 9 East Main Street) had to be hired for the purpose.

On 7 June 1878, **Bacon** signed Martha’s album. He wrote in part “Miss Martha ‘My Dear Sister’ A stranger to you but a few weeks ago. Now a sister led by the same ‘Father.’” He signed it “Your Brother Dr. O. D. **Bacon**.” It is not surprising then to find in the Record of the Members of the Fredonia Methodist Church several notations next to her name. “Removed by Certificate 9-2-1878.” “Supposed to have joined the Free Methodists.” She was not alone in rejecting the church that had rejected her champion. James and Lucy **Brooks** “withdrew 5-18-1878 over **Baconism**,” Samuel **Bradley** “withdrawn over Trustees shutting church agst Dr. **Bacon**,” Ella **Barrows** “withdrew over **Baconism** 6-15-1878,” and Frinde **Babcock** “withdrew over Baconism 7-8-1878.”

Although there is no record of exactly when Martha joined the Free Methodists, she must have been a member for a while before she was appointed to a committee on 10 October 1879. In these early days for the denomination, which called itself the “First Free Methodist Church of Dunkirk, N.Y.” the group included adherents from Forestville and Fredonia. When they met in Forestville on 28 August 1880, Martha was elected a Steward. The minutes of the society mention a meeting of the “Dunkirk and Fredonia charge” held in the church in Fredonia on 17 September 1881. That church building was a house at 27 Day Street owned by Melissa D. **Woodward**, a long-time member of the Dunkirk church. On 11 May 1880, members of the Fredonia church met there and agreed to incorporate, and one day later Melissa D. **Woodward** deeded the building and lot to the Trustees of the Free Methodist Church of Fredonia for \$475.00. The deed stipulated that the building, or one built later, was to be used only by the Free Methodist Church, and that pews should always be free of charge. Added was the stipulation that must have seemed perfectly natural to her, but is quite unexpected to the reader: that if the trustees did not live up to these guidelines “the property in whole shall fall back to Miss Martha **Aldrich** the party who furnished the purchase money or to her heirs or assigns.”

There is very little on the record about Martha **Aldrich** in the next few years. Without question she continued her involvement with her church. There are few entries in her album until a really significant one in March, 1889. It is a rather inept poem called “Life Sculpture” by W. C. **Doane**, and John Joseph **Kelly** either deliberately changed some of the wording, or, more likely, he was writing from memory. This is his version:

*Chisel in hand stood the Sculptor boy,
With his marble block before him: -
And his face lit up with a Smile of joy
As an angel dream passed o’er him.*

*He carved that dream on the yeilding [sic] Stone
With many a Sharp incision;
In heaven's own light the Sculpter Shone
He had caught that angel vision.*

*Sculptors of life are we, as we stand,
With our lives uncarved before us;
Waiting the hours when, at God's command,
Out life dream passes O'er us.*

*Let us carve it then on the yielding[sic] Stone,
With many a Sharp incision: -
Its heavenly beauty Shall be our own -
Our lives that Angel vision.*

Although we might fault the statement as poetry, Martha apparently did not. On 22 April 1891 she married him. John Joseph **Kelly** was born in Ireland in October, 1852 and emigrated to the U.S. in 1880. A laconic sentence in the "Genealogical Report on the Family of Scott **Aldrich**" states that "Joseph **Kelly** studied to be a priest, but changed to become a Free Methodist minister." Nothing more seems to be known about his conversion, nor when it took place. However, there is no question that it did. He is listed as a farmer in the *1891 Directory* at 12 West Main Street, which is about at today's *71 West Main Street*. The *1892 Census* has them still on West Main Street with Joseph as a farmer. The next entry is in the *1900 Directory* for the Rev. J. J. **Kelly** and his wife Martha on "East Main n[ea]r limits." They are also listed there in the *1900 Census* between the families of Sayles **Aldrich** and Seth **Aldrich**. The census-taker identified **Kelly** as a "Baptist Minister," which we might appropriately call a clerical error. In the *1904 Directory* they are still located on East Main Street near the village limits. The *1905 Census* lists the Sayles and Seth **Aldrich** families on East Main Street, but by then the **Kellys** had gone. That may be when they moved to Forestville. However, the Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Free Methodist Church of North America in its *1906 Conference Roll of Preachers* note J. J. **Kelly's** "Year of admission into full connection" as 1905, so their move from East Main Street might have been connected to that event.

The **Kellys** remained in Forestville until Martha's death on 15 April 1909. Her funeral service was held at the Free Methodist Church she had been instrumental in founding in Fredonia. As far as the records go, her husband disappeared as mysteriously as he had arrived. Indeed, we could have said the same kind of thing about Martha had we not had the gift of her Friendships Album.