

The First Burial in Pioneer Cemetery  
By Douglas H. Shepard, 2000

In outline, Ursula **Woodcock's** account (*Fredonia Censor* 6/18/1873) was the following. Her parents were Oliver and Asenath (**Williams**) **Woodcock**. Living in Oneida County, the family consisted of six children. The **Woodcocks** left for Fredonia along with the Richard **Williams** and James **Morgan** families. Stopping in Buffalo (this was in 1806) it then took another four days to travel from Buffalo to Fredonia. After arriving here, Mr. **Woodcock** was delegated to go on to La Boeuf (near today's Watertown, Pa.) to buy corn and have it ground. In the fall of 1806 he helped Hezekiah **Barker** build his grist mill. In October of that year, his daughter Hannah **Woodcock**, six years old, was killed while out with other children gathering nuts. A man was clearing the land nearby and a tree he was cutting down fell on her and killed her. The hands at the mill made a coffin. "They carried the little one, through dense woods to our present burying ground, where she was laid to rest under a large hemlock tree."

The other basic sources (*Fredonia Advertiser* 2/12/1864; *Fredonia Censor* 6/25/1873) written by her cousin, Sophia **Williams**, have some significant differences. Sophia's father, Richard **Williams**, exchanged his farm in Oneida County for land in Fredonia. The original settler had cleared a few acres and put part of it into corn and potatoes. Along with the **Woodcock** family, on June 1, 1807, (not 1806) they left for Fredonia. They reached Buffalo together and, after waiting a few days, sent their goods on by boat and drove overland (almost a week's journey), arriving in Fredonia on July 16th. "The little girl that was killed by the falling tree was my cousin, Hannah **Woodcock**. I was with her when she was killed. She was the first that was laid in the old Burying Ground." (*Advertiser*.) When Mr. **Williams** died in Portland on September 20, 1822 he was buried "in Fredonia's burying ground, a place he helped to select in 1807, when the first death occurred." (*Censor*.)

These versions differ as to date by one year. When was Hannah **Woodcock** buried, in 1806 or 1807? Because Mrs. Ursula **Ashley** was born in 1790 or 1791, she would have been around 15 years old when the **Woodcocks** arrived, certainly old enough to be aware of the events around her. Her cousin, Mrs. Sophia **Harris**, on the other hand was, at most, three or four years old. However, as she said in the *Advertiser* letter "I was a little child then, but some of the incidents...are as fresh in my mind as though they transpired but yesterday." And, apparently, nothing was said or written in the nine years between this 1864 letter and the version in the *Censor* in 1873 to cause her to change the account.

There is other evidence supporting the 1807 date. In March 1861, Mrs. James **Brigham** (Fanny **Risley**) tried to relieve the monotony of the sick bed for her son, George F. **Brigham**, by recounting some of her early recollections of Fredonia. When her in-laws—to-be, the **Brighams**, first came here, she said, they lived with the Richard **Williams** family for about two weeks until a house could be built. "It was while they were there that a little child was killed by the falling of a tree, the child of Mr. **Woodcock**, a relative of Mr. **Williams** living near him. The tree was cut down by Geo. W. **Pierce** and this was the first death in town." (Fanny **Risley** would have been about thirteen at the time.) (*Fredonia Censor* 9/17/1884.)

1807 seems to be the correct date.