

Life Story  
of  
James M. Wolfe  
Civil War Veteran  
Written February 1931.

James M. Wolfe - age - 86 years - December 24-1930

James M. Wolfe - Born December 24-1844 in Union Falls, Franklin County NY.

His father, James M. Wolfe-(see geneology)

His mother, Roxby Sanders Wolfe.

Father's family consisted of eleven children.

William H. Wolfe, <sup>Died as children</sup> Edgar W., Minerva, Mary W., James M., Ellen W., Alice W.,  
John, Casper W. (sec. 2 more) Acksa

Edgar and Minerva were born at Union Falls and died and were buried there in their childhood. Their graves have a stone marker.

About 1848 a terrific wind storm or hurricame devastated Union Falls. Blew down houses, tore roofs off, and demolished the sawmill where James W. Sr. worked as a sawyer. In one instance, a two inch plank was blown through the side wall of a house into a bedroom.

The family then moved about seven miles up the Saranac River to Franklin Falls where settlers were building new homes. A large saw mill had been erected. Gang saws were installed cutting as many as 15 boards at once. Lumbering was the big industry. Huge piles of boards and planks were piled on each side of the road from the saw mill. (site now occupied by Paul Smith's elec. power house) to the Basin, a distance of nearly one half mile. At that time a new plank road was built from Franklin Falls to Port Kent; nearly 35 miles. The road bed was levelled and heavy 3 inch planks were laid crosswise, making an excellant road for the teams and heavy hauling, while it lasted. A toll gate was erected and toll collected 25¢ single horse 50¢ team for upkeep. The Peter Comstock Co. kept about 25 teams hauling the lumber to the Canal boats at Port Kent.

Here James M. W. Sr. put his team (one horse an iron gray, the other nearly white and called "Curley") at work while he went to work in the mill as a sawyer. The little settlement flourished. About 60 houses were built.

A large hotel, a blacksmith shop, a shoe shop, a carpenter shop and one big general store.

Mrs. James Wolfe Sr. helped increase the family income by taking boarders and serving meals to the workmen.

Mrs. Wolfe's father and mother, an aged couple, lived nearby. Mrs. Wolfe's sister - Betsey, married a man named Hayes. The couple went to Minnesota to settle where they were later massacred by the Indians.

Mr. Wolfe Sr. came from Vermont and had no relatives living near him.

Here at Franklin Falls the years passed pleasantly and prosperously until about 1854 when <sup>see stone</sup> Mr. Wolfe's eldest son William H. 19 years of age, was instantly killed by being accidentally crushed and mangled in the machinery of the saw mill. He was buried at the Basin Cemetery. A headstone marks his grave.

This was a terrible shock and loss to Mr. & Mrs. Wolfe, but their courage and fortitude did not fail them. They persevered until 1856 when the "Big Fire" wrought havoc with their settlement. In the summer of 56 a settler by the name of Jim Rogers who lived about 1½ miles up the S.R. west of F. Falls built a smudge in a pine stump near his cabin for the purpose of driving away the flies and mosquitos. It was an exceedingly dry season and a high wind suddenly rising scattered some sparks in the dry grass and leaves. It was at once a forest fire. It swept down the river about ¼ mile then crossed at the Densmore Farm to the Franklin Falls side of the river. It went like a race horse: a wall of fire. The settlers ran for their lives across the river towards the north on higher safer ground.

Bailey Flanders, the man employed by Mr. Wolfe to drive his team, rushed the horses and lumber wagon to Mr. Wolfe's house for the family. A single wide plank reaching from the front to the rear bolster of the wagon for a seat and a long chain swing from the front to the rear axles of the wagon formed a support for the feet. On this rig Mrs. Wolfe with nine children, Casper, the baby in her arms - fled to safety. From the higher land where they were safe they watched the fire sweep their settlement; the mill and vast quantities of lumber. Only two cabins were left untouched by the fire and one of them was the home of Mr. & Mrs. Durin Sanders, the aged father & mother of Mrs. Wolfe.

After the fire came hardships.

No food and little clothing.

Neighboring settlements sent supplies. Building started again.

First temporary homes, then a new saw mill and finally a new hotel. (the old building now owned by Paul Smith Co. and occupied by O'Neil.)

Mr. Wolfe hastily constructed a single room 13 X 13 for his famil until his new house (now occupied by Will Hough and owned by Paul Smith Co.) was finished.

In digging a large basement for the new hotel two unmarked graves of two children were uncovered. The two children of a trapper named Goldsmith who lived there years before.

The little colony took on new life.

Vension was plentiful and the river was well stocked with trout.

The future promised well.

In 1858 the last crash came.

The Peter Comstock Co. unable to recover from the fire collapsed.

There was nothing left for the settlers to do but raise some vegetables and hunt and fish or migrate to some other place of industry.

Learning that large lumbering operations were being conducted on the Racquette R. and saw mills were being built at Potsdam Mr. Wolfe naturally turned in that direction.

In the summer of 58 Mr. Wolfe hired two teams to take his family and house supplies to Potsdam.

Three days were required for the journey.

Arriving at Potsdam Mr. Wolfe at once entered the mill as a sawyer.

A year later Mr. Wolfe moved about two miles down the St. Lawrence R. to Peasleyville, a new settlement where a large saw mill was being built.

Here Mr. Wolfe worked for about one year when he was suddenly taken sick and died. He was buried in the old Potsdam Cemetery. A wooden slab marked his grave. A mother with 9 children left alone in a strange place.

Who can describe their hardships? They remained in Potsdam about two years. Mrs. Wolfe did sewing and dressmaking trying to provide for the children.

The eldest son, James M. age, about 14 found a job piling lumber for three shillings per day. Sometimes he sawed wood for the neighbors.

Then the lumber business failed and the mills shut down. No work was to be found. Poverty was knocking hard at the door of the Wolfe family. Other families suffered also from the shut down of the mills. Mrs. Wolfe wanted to get back to Franklin Falls, where she would be near her relatives: A sister, Mrs. Mirinda Lark who lived about two miles from F.F. on a 50 acre farm joining what is now Pat Finnigans. She also had a brother, Oliver Sanders who lived in Wilmington on the road to Upper Jay.

The poor authorities came to her rescue and provided two single wagons and moved her and the children to where her sister, Mrs. Lark lived. About a year later she moved down to F.F. into a small abandoned house where she lived until she died. Mary, the eldest girl went to Ausable F. where she lived with her Uncle Casper Wolfe. There she died with T.B. Ellen went to Keene and lived with a family named Higley. There she worked & went to school.

While fording the stream to school one day she bruised her ankle, an infection set in and left her a cripple with a club foot and a crooked stiff knee. Here at Higley's James M. also stayed and worked for his board for about one year. Then he went back to F.F. where he lived with his mother. Here he worked at whatever job he could get. At this time he went to school about one term to Miss Elizabeth Martin who later married Paul Smith Sr.

When the Civil War broke out in '61 James M. was anxious to enlist. Not being 18, the legal age, until Dec. 24 yet he managed to enlist in Oct.

A teamster; Van Hewitt, carried 8 boys from F.F. to Plattsburgh,

James M. Wolfe

Ed. Gale

Harrison Brown

Jerome Williams & 4 others

On Oct. 15 they joined Captain William Weeds Co. The Captain was a brother to the lawyer Smith M. Weed.

They took the train at once for New York City. Here they waited two weeks for uniforms and equipment but the supplier being delayed the Co. went on by train to Washington D.C. Reaching Washington the Company was organized as Co. M. Harris Flight Cavalry later named 2nd N.Y. Cavalry.

Captain Weed was soon superseded by Captain Mitchell. This Co. was a part of Col. Davis Regiment. Later the famous Kilpatrick became commander of the regiment. The Co. after being organized, at once crossed the Potomac to Lee's Plantation and camped at Arlington Heights now the National Cemetery. Here at Arlington H. the uniforms and equipment finally arrived. Up to this time James M. had worn his civilian clothes & straw hat. Now the uniform was donned. The Co. remained at Arlington and drilled until May "62". At this time Gen. McClellan started his Peninsular Campaign to capture Richmond. The Light Cavalry then under Kilpatrick was ordered on to Fredericksburgh, passing through Centerville, Bull Run, Mannasus Junc. Catholic station and Falmouth.

Entering Falmouth a skirmish ensued and some Confed.-prisoner were taken. Here at Falmouth the Co. camped until Aug.-While here an event, incident to camp life occurred. A nearby farmer had a flock of sheep. Kilpatrick had forbidden his men to touch a sheep under penalty of a guard house sentence. But some of the men doubted the sentence so a chase for sheep ensued. One sheep was driven past James M. catching the sheep he noticed that it was old & thin so he let it go. Looking up, he was quite surprised to see Kilpatrick with two sheep. The boys in Co. M. got 7 sheep. The farmer complained to Gen. McDowell. A searching party consisting of a Lieut. & 2 soldiers were sent out and they searched Kilpatrick Regiment. The boys in Co. M. became worried. Ed Gale was quartermaster. Seizing the dead sheep he put them under his blankets in his tent, piling on other supplies, etc. Then throwing himself on the blankets he groaned in terrible agony.

When the Lieut. came to the tent he heard a soldier within exclaim "If the Dr. doesn't come soon, this man will be dead in less than an hour." The Lieut. beholding the spectacle remarked, "Can't be any sheep in here".

No sheep were found in the whole regiment. -

The next order in Aug. was for the Regiment to move back to Bull Run. This was the second Bull Run battle. Aug. 29-62 Pope was defeated and the army retreated toward Washington. Kilpatrick Regt. stopped at Camp Stoneman on the Potomac South Bank. Here they remained until Gen. McClellan made his drive at Antietam. The Regt. then moved on to Antietam. From there the Regt. moved on to Falmouth. Here the Regt. was kept busy making raids & scouting parties.

Here James M. was taken sick with Chronich Dysentery, moved to hospital in Washington: about 6 weeks in hospital. Was discharged and sent home.

Reaching Plattsburgh by train he was met there by his sister Asksa who went with him to F.F. Remaining home about one year he gained rapidly. In Dec. 63, he went to Clintonville and re enlisted - in Co. H. 2<sup>nd</sup> N.Y. Vet. Cavalry. Each volunteer was paid \$752 and 13<sup>00</sup> per mo. while in the Army.

James M. was paid 50<sup>00</sup> when he reenlisted. \$500 when he reached Elmira, and the remainder when he reached home.

The first 50<sup>00</sup> was given to his mother for supplies. He sent 200 out of the 500 to Gen. Tremble a F.F. local store keeper to keep for him until he came back from the war. James M. arrived at Arlington Heights about Jan 1, 1864. Captain Bentley of Plattsburgh commanded the company. Col. Crisley commanded the Reg't. In Feb. the Regt. boarded the transports, about 300 soldiers to each boat and started down the Atlantic, and through the Gulf of Mexico to New Orleans. The soldiers carried their saddles, arms, and equipment by boat, but the horses were supplied by the Gov't. and kept corraled at N.O. ready for the soldiers when they came. The soldiers were terribly sea sick on board but J.M. did not become sick until they reached the Gulf of Mexico. Arriving at N.O. they remained there about one month, then started on the Red River expedition under Gen. Banks. Small transports and gun boats ascended the Red R. while the Cavalry followed up the Red R. road along the bank of the River. Reaching Grandy Core on the R. River they camped there about 3 days, pushing on they reached Camden & there a skirmish ensued in which about 60 men were killed or wounded the the Union Ranks. The Confederates were driven out and the Regt. pushed on up the river to Pleasant Hill.

Here a battle was fought, Apr 9-64. The day before the Confed - had beaten Smith at Sabine Cross Roads. The next day Smith joined Banks at Pleasant Hill. A stand was taken on P. Hill the Confed - stormed the

James M. Wolfe

Hill and tried to capture it but were driven back. Some prisoners were taken. One rebel was laughed at because they were beaten. "Yes" he retored, "But we gave Hell yesterday,

Gen. Banks gave up the expedition and retreated down the R.R. to Morganzie Bend on the Missipp. On the Red R. expedition the lack of good drinking water caused the Union men to suffer quite severely.

Poor water, fresh meat and hot weather caused chronic dysentery in the Army and many soldiers died with it. Many of the sick were taken to the hospital at New O. James M. among them.

There he remained about six weeks, with the fever and chronic dys - as soon as he was able to travel he was discharged and sent home by boat to St. Louis then by train to Chicago then east thru Cleveland to Whitehall, where free transportation ended. By mistake he named Whitehall as the end of his journey instead of Plattsburgh, the nearest R.R. station to F.F. He left New O. with only 5<sup>00</sup>. Reaching White Hall he had 1<sup>50</sup> left after selling his blanket for 5<sup>00</sup>, on the boat to St. Louis. Reaching Whiteball he took a boat to Port Kent. On the lake he told the Captain that he was trying to get home and had only 1<sup>50</sup>. The Captain said that the 1<sup>50</sup> would do that he might ride to Port Kent. Arriving at P. Kent he took the stage to Keeseville. At Keeseville he told the stage driver he had no money. The driver was quite provoked. Fletcher Avery, a teamster from Saranac Lakes, who knew James M. paid the driver. A stage driver, named Miller from Saranac Lakes informed James M. that his mother was dead. This was a shock to James M. who was so near home. This was July; she died in April.

Don Carlor Wood, father of S.R. Wood, dug her grave. James M. paid him 1<sup>00</sup> for the labor.

Taking the Ausable stage he rode to New Sweden - between Clintonville & Ausable F. There he remained at his Uncle Casper Wolfe's - father of Legrand & Marie - about one week.

He then took the Saranac Stage to F.F. arriving there about Aug. 1. There he found the family scattered. Casper, the youngest (12) was in Wilmington with his mother's brother - Oliver Sanders.

Ellen was at Whiticombs in F.F.

Acksa was at Dan Hathaways

Alice was working out among the neighbors. James M. went into the house that his mother had occupied and got the family together again.

Acksa, widow of Jerome Wilkins who died in the war was ill with T.B. The family lived together there about two years. James then rented the Tom Ryan farm recently owned by Will Wolfe.

Here he lived one year with Ellen and Casper, while he worked the most of the time for Dam Flack, a near by farmer His sister Alice was now married to Jack Condon. The couple went to Plattsburgh to live. While living on the Tom Ryan farm his sister Acksa died in F.F. where she was staying with a friend Mrs. M. Allen. Acksa had received a pension of  $8^{00}$  per month soon after the war until her death. James M. bought her coffin and buried her.

From the Tom Ryan farm the remaining three moved to Reardon Hill farm. Consisting of sixty acres. This was bought jointly by James & Casper from Tom Carney. Eleen kept house while J. & C. worked on different jobs - usually lumbering winters and on farms in the summer. Casper was about 18 when they bought the RH Farm, at about 25 he married Almeda Smith. About three years later James C.W. Jr. was born on the R. Farm. About one year later Cass moved on the Smith place about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile above F.F.



This was the place where Almeda S. grew up as a girl. James M. lived alone on the R. Farm about 1 year after Cass moved, his sister Ellen having died about a year previous, James M. bought her coffin and buried her beside her sister Acksa & their mother at the Basin Cemetery.

After about 12 years the R. Farm was abandoned.

James M. later moved in with C

After 5 or 6 years James bought the Jim Roger farm of 200 a about 1 mile up the Saranac R. There James lived about 30 years when he sold it to Paul Smith.

He then bought a house & lot in Wilmington Village where he lived about 2 yrs. Selling the place, he moved to St. Armands on the Sebra farm which he bought. About 4 yrs later he sold the farm to Phelp Smith. He then bought a house and lot in Bloomingdale where he lived about 2 yrs when he sold again. Becoming quite feeble in his advanced years he spent the most of his time with his nephews and nieces. He had lived alone, quite like a hermit, for many years but in his old age it was not safe to do so any more. About 1928 he rented a small bungalow from his nephew J.C.W. The bungalow was remodeled to his liking - with modern conveniences and being about 50 yards from the Bonnie View house made a fine location for "Uncle Jim" for he still wanted to be independent by his own fire side when he could keep the house as warm in winter as he pleased and smoke & read in peace & quietness. Here at 86 the curtain of life, that inevitable shade, in fast shutting out the light of a long life. It is sunset for "Uncle Jim". Just as the light of day sinks to darkness back of Whiteface, just so will his light soon go out back of the hills of eternity and it will be night.

, "The name Uncle Jim" - character, temper - generosity, etc.