

EARLY DAYS OF CEILA FISH PADEN

“... Since one of Celia’s poems was published in a preceding issue of the Dispatch, a number of requests have been made for more poetry by this talented pioneer of our town. One of the most interesting of Celia’s poems was read by her at the Old Settler’s meeting at Galva in late August of 1887. Carried in full by the Geneseo Republic of August 26, 1887, the poem takes us back to the New York and Pennsylvania homes of the girl who would one day come to Illinois with her husband and family, or part of it at least, and write a prominent chapter in the history of the Galesburg and Woodland communities.”{Note by - The author of “The Echoing Pen”, a newspaper article – lcs }

The following original poem, “states the Republic, “ was read at the Old Settler’s meeting, at Galva, last week by Celia Paden of Woodhull, who is aged 83 years:

**Young people, I am pleased to meet you,
Although I am very old,
And with warmth of heart I greet you,
Younger hearts may prove more cold.**

**I was once as young and sprightly
As you each are at this time,
Then the days and weeks passed lightly
In that pleasant home of mine.**

**Near the greenwood bright with flowers
Gay birds warbled in the spring
There I spent those happy hours
Which such scenes to childhood bring.**

**A cabin there of logs erected
Rough, though neat and very warm
There we lived for years, protected
From summer’s heat and winter’s storm.**

**There I had some younger sisters
Who our rustic home enjoyed
There we worked and there we flitted
Little hands were all employed.**

**There we rode old Doll to water
Around the big oak tree we come
The colt and dog both followed after
While we drove the cattle home.**

**There we did the woolen spinning
Hatcheled* flax and milked the cows
There we spun and wove the linen
Churned the butter, swept the house.**

***Hatcheled = to separate flax fibers with a hatchel**

There the tin and pewter scoured
Kept it looking bright and good
There we went out hunting flowers
Picking berries in the wood.

There we made the maple sugar
And the syrup, all so sweet
Baked the cakes upon the griddle
Which we with the syrup eat.

There we caught the little fishes
As they glided in the stream
Cooked the meals and washed the dishes
Cut the garments, sewed the seams.

This we had to do with fingers
Needle, thimble and a thread
Long by candle light we lingered
To finish ere we went to bed.

There we doubled yarn and twisted
Knit the socks our brothers wore
Braided straw we made their hats of
And some we traded at the store.

Some we braided for our neighbors
For their boys both small and large
About three shillings were the prices
For the common hats to charge.

Thus we earned a little money
Bought us now and then a dress
Which we wore to church on Sunday
They were called our Sunday best.

The church, a cabin built of logs
Down by the maple wood
The congregation was not large
But still was very good.

Through the week-time on we glided
Wore our home-spun as before
Did the scrubbing, washing, ironing
And a lot of chores outdoors.

There we fed the little chickens
Ducks and goslings for awhile
But we did not feed the turkeys
Lots of turkeys then ran wild.

There my brothers cut the timber
Sometimes made the flocks grow thinner
There they made a trap and caught them --
Had two for my wedding dinner.

There my brothers cut the timber
Piled the logs and burned the same
Cleared the land, I well remember
Where my father sowed the grain.

When the grain was fit for harvest
McCormick reapers they had none
In their hands they took a sickle
Cut a swath through one by one.

Then they stopped and hung their sickles
On suspenders, I believe
Gathered up the grain and bound it
While returning, into sheaves.

Next the fingered cradle came
That laid the grain in swaths so fast
The people thought that they had learned
All there was to learn at last.

Now we see that they were blind, sir
As in research we advance
Next the reaper then the binder
Leaves the cradle little chance.

I remember back still farther
When I was a tiny child
With my sisters and my brothers
How we loved our father's smiles.

How our mother dear caressed us
And our hearts by love did win
Spun and made the clothes to dress us
While we were too young to spin.

In New York state, we first resided
Near Rensselaerville, where I was born
On July 1, in eighteen four
On a little stone-fenced farm.

I remember all about it --
House and barn, and trees and all

And the little fence around it
All inclosed {sic} with nice stone wall.

Then my father went and sold out
Oh! It almost broke my heart
From all those early scenes of childhood
I forever had to part.

Then we moved to different places
At each sojourning for awhile
Lacking schools in many cases
Having none for miles and miles.

Then our father nightly taught us
When the day of toil was done
Round the pleasant fire he brought us
To our places, everyone.

Then he took the book and gave us
Words for each in turn to spell
All those pleasant nightly lessons
I remember, oh, so well.

Now my father took a notion
We would travel farther west
Sought a home in Pennsylvania's
Almost trackless wilderness.

Here was where we loved and labored
In that home so long a while
When we wished to visit neighbors
Often had to walk for miles.

Here we also took our lessons
From our father every night
Here received our daily blessings
Learned to guide our lives aright.

Here wild beast the woods infesting
Often filled our hearts with fear
While we on our beds were resting
In summer time and winter drear.

Here we heard the wolves a howling
In the lonely hours of night
Saw and heard the bears a growling
While the day was clear and light.

**Here was where we did the spinning
Where we wove and where we knit
Where we made the maple sugar
I so well remember yet.**

**Here was where we fed the chickens
As you before have understood
Here was where they caught the turkeys
Wandering in the chestnut wood.**

**Now all such fatiguing labors
In a measure done away
There are few among our neighbors
Who can spin or weave today.**

**Women find their tasks more easy
Getting goods already made
Making garments by machinery
Throws the needle in the shade.**

**The farmer's work is very lighter
No trees to cut, no logs to roll
They plant in smooth prairie
And with machinery to do the whole.**

**Now free schools and institutions
Throughout the land both far and wide
An equal chance of education
To rich and poor alike provide.**

**Now I thank you for your attention
While in reading I engaged
Though you still are young and brilliant
You yet respect the feeble, aged.**

**May your lives be long and happy
Any years of joys to see
When you are growing old, perhaps – then
You may kindly think of me.**

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by Celia Fish Paden – August 1887