

Newt Edwards Won Fame for Alcona Village

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HARRISVILLE—Uncle Newt left us the day before the 4th of July 1957. Nobody remembers the first 4th of July Newton Edwards celebrated after coming to the United States from his birthplace in Canada. Someone found that he was born in Canada August 27, 1860, that he had been an OddFellow over 58 years. Sometime long before the turn of the century he had been married and had two children, but no one knows where they went so long, long ago. If "Uncle Newt" had ever heard from any of them, no one knows. He had outlived all of his relatives except a niece and one nephew. Uncle Newt almost became 97 years old.

Some long time ago, he came to the Village of Alcona as a master harness-maker for the famous Alger Smith Company. He settled there and saw the town grow to more than 3,000 in population. He lived there even after it became a ghost town, leaving about seven years ago and remaining in Harrisville until he went away. And now we have left him at Mount Joy Cemetery on the big hill that looks down on the old village of Alcona, and then just on a little to Lake Huron. Maybe in his keen blue eyes, now closed, he can still see the waves lapping at the places where large docks and great lumber yards stood to take away the legendary lumber cargoes that made Alcona a famous port of call so long ago.

UNCLE NEWT was remembered by many of us, including "Believe it or Not"--Ripley, as the Mayor, Postmaster, Telegraph Operator, D & M Station Agent, Fire Chief, Police Chief, Commissioner of Public Works and "Keeper" of the Village of Alcona. Besides that, he kept a little store where he had patent medicine and bandages for first-aid and nursing of the sick in the area.

To picture Uncle Newt, and his town of Alcona, takes a little imagination--because it all happened so long ago. But if you go to the Village of Alcona and can get the assistance of his long time crony, Bill Clark, and his wife, you can "see" the Village that was nearly as old as Uncle Newt. The difference is [that] the Village of Alcona died, when the late Russell A. Alger left for Grosse Pointe, after the timber was gone, but Uncle Newt stayed on and later his pal, Bill Clark and his wife, came to keep the town alive. They lived on after the town went back into the ground. Bill is still there and Uncle Newt is now on the hill.

Alcona was a lumber port, with streets, lovely homes, modern water system and sidewalks, hotels, all sorts of mercantile businesses, and over 3,000 people to make a typical lumber port town boom. The fishing was also good and the late George Freer, along with others, sailed daily during the open water to harvest the great crop of the inland seas. Then one by one all left except Newton Edwards. He stayed on. He became Commissioner of Elections. On Election Day, he posted notices. He raised the flag. He went outside and announced that the polls were open. He then went into the booth, drew the curtain and voted for the candidates for office. There were the usual offices necessary to run a once thriving community, but each year the results were the same: Newton Edwards had been elected to all of the offices by one vote.

UNCLE NEWT kept in touch with the outside, because his lifetime pass on the D & M gave him transportation, so that he regularly attended his Lodge and kept up his acquaintances with his old friends, but when the 1:15 went north in the morning, Uncle Newt was aboard to go home to Alcona. By the time the passenger services were discontinued, Bill Clark had moved back and so he could then ride in with Bill in the automobile. When Newt got sick then, Bill and his wife would come over and keep the fire hot and pour the lemons, aspirin and quinine into Newt until he got better, and get better he always did.

No one knows how Uncle Newt learned to cook, but in the land of excellent cooks, Uncle Newt was outdone by none, man or woman, especially on wild game dishes. He was a fabulous hunter, guide and fisherman, but not

even that, nor his steady wood-cutting kept him from tending the Post Office, Express, Freight, and Telegraph and Telephone Exchange, not only because he was a part of each of them, but also because he knew that in emergencies people would depend on Uncle Newt. No hour of the night or early morning found him away from his post of duty. He was the sure means of communication to the outside and the natives from the farms a good horse-trip away knew that and depended on Newt to get the message to the outside.

Why does one man, bereft of family, stay on alone to keep alive a ghost town? Why did he faithfully hold elections and equally as faithfully perform civic and humanitarian duties? Maybe because his sense of humor so keenly prompted him, or maybe because his robust and expressive sense of humor so keenly also lit the faith that the Village of Alcona would live again. The fact is certain, he did all of those things and more, too: that only those many that have gone on before him may know, but somehow it seems clear that Uncle Newt won't sleep deeply on the hill overlooking his town. Maybe somehow his twinkling blue eyes, and his eager and enthusiastic, "Sure!, Sure!" will be heard coming down off the hill of Mount Joy and into the Village of Alcona to wake it again, and recreate the dreams that the lumber barons might have had. We all know that Newt Edwards had the dreams and we are happy that we put him on the hill real close to his Village of Alcona.

(Originally published in *The Alpena News*, July 12, 1957)



Newton Edwards at his store in the village of Alcona.