

ELLEN DORCAS HARN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

which she wrote for her own Harn family history manuscript

"There being so little that is praise worthy, or even interesting to say of the fifth child and third daughter of John Harn (II) and Charlotte Hay Harn that I am somewhat reluctant to make notes of that personage, because that identical person is my veritable self.

*As the records have it, I was born at the old family homestead near West Falls, Frederick county, Md. January 18th, 1829. I was given the name Ellen Harn Crawford, and the name Dorcas for my great grandmother, **Dorcas Davis HARN**. In early life my health was somewhat delicate, having trouble with pain in the ears. Now at the age of seventy-three my health is robust and strong and my hearing and sight about normal. My greatest suffering during the years of childhood was not because of lack of health but because of extreme inordinate bashfulness, which to me at least accentuated itself in real suffering.*

When about six or seven years of age I was sent, with the older children, to a school taught by a kind and indulgent man by the name of Knox. The school was taught in the cellar kitchen of a log house about midway between Friendship Factory and Lawrence Mills, Maryland. I went to school every day for near two weeks and could not be coaxed to face the big boys and girls of the school and say my letters. It was not stubbornness - simply bashfulness. The ice was broken by the teacher telling me that if I would 'say my letters' I might go home before school was out and ride home with my father in the wagon, who passed by to and from the mill. The lesson was recited, the ride home was had, and from that hour I have never seen the day when the schoolroom was not a beloved place for study. In memory of that I never suffered a pupil of mine to leave the school room until it, at least said "a."

My second teacher was George McCartney, whom I dearly loved and respected because of his excellency imparting knowledge as well as his level headedness in holding control of his school. After my first experience with the alphabet I was a rapid learner, not so much in books as from hearing others recite. While in the school of Mr. McCartney, and while my sister Susan was standing in the spelling class, I would take my seat in front of her and spell the word for her, in a whisper. The teacher caught on, cuffed my ears with the Bible and marched me into the class saying;

"I never dreamed you could spell those words, now spell if you want to." In this school I learned to conjugate the verbs, to love, and to be through all their moods and tenses by hearing a young man, Cleggett Dorsey, recite his grammar lesson. I was not more than nine years, if that. I had no idea what it all meant, but it served me a good purpose when years after I took up the science of grammar. Time was simply lost with the next two teachers, Charles Meade and Joshua Howard. The next teacher, a Mr. Spiter was somewhat of a loose brained fellow but had the faculty of interesting the pupils and imparting the knowledge he had. By this time my mother had concluded that I was now too old to go to school and must turn my attention to learning domestic affairs. This was a sore trial for me. The teacher had put my younger sister Corille to studying grammar, and the idea of her being in advance of me in any study was not conducive to a peaceful frame of mind. I undertook to surreptitiously keep pace with her but I found it uphill work, at my age, trying without help to master an abstruse science. When school closed in the spring I proposed to my two younger sisters, Corille



and Jane, that we continue our studies by having a little school of our own, to which they readily assented. To avoid ridicule from the older brothers and sisters we betook ourselves to a thick clump of pine woods on the hill opposite the house one beautiful Sunday morning. It was very pleasant in the early morning seated with back to the trees with the fallen pine needles for carpet. Finding as the day grew apace, the heat oppressive and that the lapping and over lapping of the thick foliage shut out the air, Corille suggested that we ascend the trees. Being expert climbers we were soon perched as near the top as we dared. Swinging to and fro on the slender trees we found our school room most pleasant. We pursued our studies there asking turns in asking and answering questions for a number of Sundays, until a torn dress or two provoked strong dissent from mother, and we abandoned our aerial schoolroom. It gave me great comfort that now I stood on equal ground with my younger sisters. This was the finale of my common school education.

I was a voracious reader, devouring every thing that came to hand. In my first tussle with Homer's Iliad, I came near being floored. I naturally fell into the rhythm of the metre but the expression of thought in unvested sentences I was not able to master. I resolved to read the two volumes from beginning to end, and

I did, without much idea of the ground gone over. A second reading, which I at once commenced, opened up new and beautiful visions, both poetical and historical and I reread the volumes with delight. I read much of Unites States, English and Roman Histories and read and reread all the volumes of Gardner's outlines of History. The Hagerstown Almanac was an annual feast, and the Frederick Examiner (newspaper), a weekly one.

In the spring of 1849 I went to Baltimore on a visit. While there I received a letter from my sister Sarah, who was then teaching at the Cedar Hill Seminary, saying she would defray my expenses for the coming year. Fearing that my parents would file objections to any such undertaking, without any preparation or plan for returning home I proceeded at once to Pennsylvania and entered the Seminary as a student on May 10th, 1849. In the spring of 1852, March 31st, a class of seven including myself received diplomas, the honors of the class being conferred on Miss Basler as salutitorian and myself as valedictorian."

(Ellen then lists teaching jobs at 9 grade schools and 4 different colleges and administrative positions including Preceptress (once) Principal (twice) First Assistant (once) and Second Assistant (twice) in PA, MA, MD, MN, OH, W.VA and NY. She and her sister, Sara Harn Williams, usually taught at the same schools.)

"Here, I would note, that we two sisters were the first to enter the public schools of Frederick county Md. as lady teachers. Because of this innovation we were closely scrutinized but we both closed the school year giving satisfaction. Since we thus opened the door it is gratifying to note that the doors have never since been closed to lady teachers in Maryland.

(When she worked as first assistant to the principal in Barton, MD), *it was the desire of the trustees that I should ask for the position of principal. The School commissioners refusing to pay me man's wages for man's work I declined, and kept my old position of first assistant.*

Because of the tragic death, by drowning of my sisters third daughter, I went, in August of 1881, to Nebraska to rest a year from teaching. In the company of my niece Mary Williams and her father, I visited the Rockies, Denver and Georgetown, Colorado. I received a telegram that I was wanted in my old position in the school of Barton, Md. I remained there until December 1885, when I resigned to take charge of the Kenesaw school with one assistant. I taught there until the summer of 1888 when I quit the schoolroom for good.

In the spring of 1886 I built myself a comfortable home on a ten-acre lot, for which I paid \$40 per acre, lying across the section line from "Desert Home." With my avails (money) in teaching I purchased forty acres of land. The house and out buildings cost about \$1200.

I rather enjoy writing. I have seldom been refused access to (news)papers, and for six years filled a column in the Kenesaw Citizen, principally on temperance and equal suffrage. Upon the latter I am much of a crank as Abigail Adams or John Randolph. Ever since I was eleven years old I have never been able to understand why I should hand over my earnings for men to spend, and I forbidden to say how it should be spent.

Being on the streets of Kenesaw on the day of the election in November of 1898, the impulse seized upon me to go to the polls and demand my vote. The consternation of the judges, and their perturbation of mind when I made known my errand, puts into full play one risible muscle even though nearly half of a decade of years have passed. The scene was simply too funny, to see those judges so completely thrown off their bases. One of the judges flushed and paled with anger yet maintained his pose to the end. Another was so disturbed he could not find the page, his hand so trembling, of the word "male," which closed the door of the polling booth against me. Several times he looked up at me hopelessly bewildered and confused, and when he did find the precious masculine bolt against universal freedom, his countenance changed to one of relief second delight."



"It has been a source of exceedingly great pleasure that I have been enabled to throw a searchlight upon obscurity, and put in durable form many things that might have been lost to history. So deeply interested have I many times been in my research of the people of the silent generations, that I have so lost myself until it seemed that they were visible forms, and that I was actually holding intercourse with living beings and that I was one with them."

Ellen Dorcas HARN, Oct 7, 1893, commenting on her two-decade long Harn family research project.



Ellen's House in NB