



*Autobiography of*  
JOHN RUSSELL BARTLETT

[*This portion of the autobiography appears to have been written in 1867.*]

[1] At the particular request of my wife and children I write the following incidents in my life from my birth; this little and unimportant record being for their especial use.

I was born in Providence, Rhode Island on the 23d of October 1805. My father was Smith Bartlett, living while I write this, at Cape Vincent, New York. He was born in April 1780. My mother was Nancy, daughter of John Russell, the son of Thomas, who came from Boston to Providence in the early part of the 18th century.<sup>1</sup>

My father was the son of Rufus Bartlett and was born in Cumberland, R. I. My father's brothers and sisters were Abner; Phila, married Dr. Lamb, of Grafton, Mass; & Anne, married Geo. Ballou, of Cumberland, R. I. My grandfather [great-grandfather] was Abner Bartlett, who also lived in Cumberland or Smithfield.<sup>2</sup>

[2] My mother's brothers and sisters will be found in the annexed note \* [*none provided*].<sup>3</sup>

While an infant my father removed to Utica, New York, then called "the West," where he remained but a short time. Believing that a better opening for business existed in Upper

\* Brothers and sisters of my mother. See Russell Genealogy.<sup>3</sup>

Canada he removed to Kingston [Ontario], after but a few months stay in Utica, and established himself in business as a merchant.<sup>4</sup> This must have been in the year 1807.<sup>5</sup>

[1806–1824, Kingston, Ontario]

The earliest school that I remember to have attended was kept by Mrs. Trimmer, and was what we would now call an infant's school. I was then six years old. When I grew older I was sent to a school kept by William Moon, an Englishman, whose pleasant genial face is still strongly impressed on my mind. He was rather an aged [3] man, and married one of his former pupils, which made a good deal of talk at the time.

When the war of 1812 with Great Britain broke out all Americans were required to leave Canada within a stipulated period, or take the oath of allegiance to His Majesty George 3d. My father's business was then much extended, so that, to close it up suddenly and leave the province would have been attended with serious loss, if not total ruin. He therefore determined to remain and continue his business, which, at that time, was the most extensive of any merchant in Upper Canada. All his goods were purchased by him in Montreal, where he made frequent visits. Merchandize was then transported on the St. Lawrence in Canadian batteaux, which were large open boats rowed by eight or ten men. It was a long and tedious voyage up the river in these boats, which always came in numbers of from five to twenty. When they returned empty, with the aid of the current, the voyage was made about four days. In the winter merchandize was brought from Montreal in Canadian sleighs, called by them "trains," [4] or in French "traineaux." These were drawn by

a single horse, and could not, therefore, carry much. Two crates of crockery, or a single cask of Jamaica rum (the common spirituous liquor then drank) made a load. Sometimes during the winter twenty of these teams filled with merchandize would arrive for my father, the arrival of which would cause as much sensation as the arrival of a great ocean steamer did the first years of their crossing the Atlantic. In those days merchants did not, as now, confine themselves to one description of merchandize, but they dealt in everything. I remember that my father kept Dry Goods, Groceries, Liquors, Hardware, Flour, Crockery, Iron and Steel, Saddles, Boots and Shoes, Paper and Stationery, in fact, every kind of merchandize required in the country.

I remember what delight it gave me to help my father open his numerous boxes of new goods, particularly the crates of crockery that contained toys. He used to promise us that if we were good children we [could] sit up an hour or two in the evening to help him open his new goods. My brother William and I once used our spending money in buying toys in Montreal [5] which we resold at retail, deriving therefrom a handsome profit. With the money made on these toys after several operations, we bought a set of silver spoons which we presented to our mother. On one occasion during the war my father lost about ten thousand dollars value in merchandize in batteaux coming up the St. Lawrence, taken by the U.S. forces. The goods were taken to Ogdensburgh [New York], and although he went there personally to recover them, and a promise was made him that, being private property they should be restored, he was never able to obtain them.

I remember distinctly many events of the war, although I was but seven years of age when it broke out. It absorbed the

whole attention of the people as Kingston, the chief town, was exposed to an attack both by land and water. Reports constantly came in that the American fleet would attack it. Kingston was then, and is still a strongly fortified place, protected chiefly by Fort Henry, which stands on an elevated point of land opposite the town, its guns commanding the harbor. The town was enclosed with stakes or pickets, and palisades; and [6] entrances were through gates leading to the principal streets. These gates were protected by Block-houses, the lower part of which were of stone and the upper or projecting parts of heavy timber. Some of these block-houses were standing a few years since, and may be still. A large military force was kept at Kingston during the war, the barracks for which were in the lower part of the town near the river, now enclosed by a high stone wall. This was an old French Fort, and was known as Fort Frontenac. I remember when a boy that there were many remains of the old fort, particularly a circular stone building stuccoed with plaster and gravel, called the powder magazine. This building was afterwards torn down. On one occasion when an increased force of soldiers came to the town, [I remember] that they were billeted on the inhabitants. I remember well that a British officer was billeted on our family. He was a gentlemanly man and made himself quite agreeable to the family.

On the [blank] the American fleet entered the harbor of Kingston and created the greatest consternation. They bombarded the town [7] during the whole day; but the guns at Fort Henry kept the ships so far off that little if any damage was done. I do not remember that any one was killed in Kingston. My father took his musket and with other citizens went a few miles into the interior to protect the town from

attack in that quarter. Our [family] on the morning of the day of the bombardment, that is, my mother and her children, went to the house of Mr. Alcott, who kept a tavern in Store Street, on the north side, being the stone house next above that of Mr. Heath, the druggist. I distinctly remember the roar of the artillery the whole of the day. From the top of the house, we could see the enemy's fleet; and when they took their departure towards evening, all firing ceased and our family and many others who had sought safety there, returned home.<sup>6</sup> My father then lived in a two story wooden house on the corner of what was then Store Street (now Princess) and King Street. (I think was the name of the street that intersected it) It is the south-west corner and opposite to the corner house now belonging to my cousin [8] Mrs. R. M. Rose. We occupied this same house during the war and for some time previous.

The house opposite was a low wooden one of one story built of wood and painted red. There lived a Mr. Demill [Anthony Demill], who married my mother's sister Amy Russell [Amey Russell] who lived with us. Upon his death not long after she married Captain George Smith, an English Naval Officer, who commanded one of the British ships at Kingston during the war. By her second marriage she had a daughter Amy [Amey], who, upon growing up, became the wife of Mr. Roderick M. Rose, a Scotsman, of Kingston, by whom she had a large family of children, most of which are now living in or near Kingston. Much of Mrs. Rose's early life was passed in our family, hence she seemed very near to us all, and is regarded still by us with feelings of affection.\*

\* The children of Mrs. Rose are George Smith [George Smith Rose] who served in the U.S. Army during the rebellion. Married

[9] Mr. Demill, having no children, left all his property to his wife, which has since become very valuable. Some of his relatives soon after his death made an effort to recover it but were unsuccessful.

At the close of the war, in the year 1816 or 17, my father determined to leave Canada and settle in the city of New York. He accordingly removed there with his family. He took a house in Brooklyn, where we lived some six months, and where his children attended school. New York then had a population of [approximately 200,000]. On several occasions when I went over to the city, I made bold to venture up Broadway to Canal Street, which then appeared to be on the limits. A small stream then ran down Canal Street, over which was a bridge. I remember standing on this bridge and looking towards the North River. Our family, after a brief residence in Brooklyn, came to Providence to visit the family of my uncle William Russell, who then lived on the corner of Star and Benefit Street. Leaving his family here, my father went to Canada to close up his business. Finding business active and the [10] country prosperous, he purchased some valuable property in Kingston, in Front Street, and determined to return there with his family and resume business. Soon after we all returned to Kingston. In 1819, Feb. 11, my mother died, leaving six children, all she ever had.<sup>7</sup>

I now went to the school of Mr. Baxter, then the principal school in Kingston. About a year after when about 13 or 14 years of age, William, my elder brother, and myself were

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Mary L. Israel of Portsmouth, N. H. [George] died at Sacketts Harbor November 20, 1876, leaving four children.

sent to Lowville Academy, Lewis County, State of New York [Fig. 1]. This place is about [twenty-five] miles from Watertown. We remained there about two years. I liked the village, which was, and is still, one of the most pleasant ones in that part of the State. I also liked the school, the principal was then Mr. Stephen Taylor.<sup>8</sup> I boarded in the family of Dr. Perry, an excellent man with whose family I became much attached. While at school here, the boys, every Saturday used to go to Black River, about two miles distant to bathe and shoot. The celebrated "John Brown Tract" of land borders the Black River at this point, and the boys often penetrated it for some distance, although we knew it was full of [11] wild animals. Panthers were killed several times near where the boys used to go. This is still a vast and untrodden wilderness. It is so cold that corn and wheat seldom come to maturity, so that of the many persons who have gone there to settle and cultivate the soil, none have remained. At the time I was at school at Lowville, a number of Germans took up land in the John Brown tract, but they all abandoned it within two years after their arrival.

In going to Kingston we used to take the stage to Sacketts Harbor, where we took small sailing schooners for Kingston. On one occasion when returning home this way to spend my vacation our vessel was shipwrecked in Reed's Bay near the extreme end of Wolfe Island in Lake Ontario. The passengers escaped to the shore where we built a fire and remained two days. There were no houses near. On the morning of the third day we learned from a man who came to cut wood near us, where we were. Two of the passengers and myself then set off, and after a [12] tiresome walk of some ten or twelve miles through the woods, we came to a settlement opposite