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❖ HISTORY ❖

... OF ...

PETER AND MARY BEST

... AND ...

❖ THEIR FAMILY. ❖

Read before a Reunion of their Descendants, held
near the Old Homestead, in Hilliar Township,
Knox County, Ohio, on the Centenary
of the Birth of Peter Best,
May 13th, 1897,

BY NOLAN RICE BEST, A GRANDSON.

PUBLISHED BY DIRECTION OF THE FAMILY.

❖ 1897. ❖

Chicago, Ill.

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Dec. 10. 1907

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HISTORY

Family history carries with it a degree and character of interest pertaining to no other sort of human annals. It is history down to bed rock; history at close hand; history not on far battlefield nor in lofty forum, but come to stand in the very doors of our own dwelling places. Whether the story be written with fullness of vivid incident, or whether its meager lines leave much to be read between, the history of a family is the history of alternate hours of mirth and hours of mourning; of days joyful for the birth of children and the marriage of young men and maidens, and of days sorrowful for the rupture of household associations or more sorrowful in the awful presence of death. It is the history of home; of love that sanctifies home, and of labor that home love lightens; of trials, struggles, reverses, hopes, victories. It is real life's real romance. Even though there be in the family line names of the great whose noble deeds their descendants delight to recount, yet the highest charm of the ancestral story clings still to the hearthstone, over which the crackling flames have from generation to generation sung the epic of commonplace life.

One feels these things with any family history, but when it is into the records of your own genealogical line that you delve, the unfolding story has a double thralldom over you. Here is the voice of your own blood speaking to you out of the past; the hand of your own flesh reaching down to connect you with centuries and decades long since gone by. One becomes enchanted with studying and learning of forefathers and foremothers, generations removed, and keenly is the regret felt that so little may be known of them. If the ancestors of the family represented here to-day could have foreseen how we of their later kin lament the poverty of our knowledge concerning

them, they would certainly have been at more pains to leave behind them memorials of their lives. But they were in their own day a busy, preoccupied people, who did well the duties at their hands and fell on sleep at length with little thought for the posterity for whom they had builded better than they knew. The stress of their present shut out a future, save the future which meant to them a hallowed and eternal rest.

The history written for this occasion must needs therefore be a meager one.

We celebrate today the centennial anniversary of the birth of Peter Best (reverence be to his name), father, grandfather or great-grandfather to the most of these present. He was born May 13th, 1797. Back of him we are able to go with certainty only a single generation on either hand. Further than that nothing but a dim tradition, disassociated from any names, leads us. Peter Best was the son of John and Mary Best. The mother's maiden name was Haas. John Best, who was born in New Jersey, June 15th, 1759, was most probably of Scotch parentage. Mary Haas, whose birth date was May 10th, 1767, was of a Holland Dutch family. It seems likely, though by no means certain, that they were both children of foreign-born parents, who had crossed the wide sea from Europe. The emigration, in either branch or in both, may however have been in an earlier generation. The names of John Best's brothers are recorded to have been James, William, Cornelius and Michael. He also had a half brother Daniel. Of the Haas family there seems to be neither record nor tradition.

The marriage of John Best and Mary Haas occurred on November 2d, 1784. There were born to them the following children on the respective dates indicated:

Mary,	-	-	-	June 6th, 1788.
John,	-	-	-	April 3d, 1791.
James,	-	-	-	April 23d, 1794.
Peter,	-	-	-	May 13th, 1797.

William, - - - March 27th, 1800.
 Eleanor, - - - December 7th, 1802.
 Jacob, - - - April 11th, 1804.

As appears herefrom our immediate ancestor was the fourth child and third son of this family. Of the two daughters, Mary's family name became by marriage Rush, and Eleanor's became Bond. Most of the children gradually were scattered abroad from home. Some settled in New York, some in Ohio and some in northern Indiana and southern Michigan. All are long since deceased.

The parents both died in Pennsylvania. The wife went to her long home April 24th, 1822; the husband remained among earthly scenes seventeen years longer, dying in April, 1839. The sacred dust of both is mingled with the earth of Chillisauqua graveyard in Northumberland County, Pennsylvania, near where they had long lived.

But now we must turn aside to speak a word of the family of her to whose memory this gathering owes no less honor than to the revered name of Peter Best—his noble-hearted wife, Mary—his worthy helpmate and the loved mother of his children. She was born June 5th, 1802, eldest daughter of John Trimmer and Elizabeth Lanterman, who were married in New Jersey, September 12, 1801. The father was of German descent, born in 1781, and the mother first saw light March 12, 1779.

It was after the marriage of their daughter Mary and another daughter that John Trimmer and his wife, with a large family of younger children, removed to Illinois, leaving the two married daughters behind in New Jersey. The Trimmer family had but just arrived in McLean County, Illinois, where they had homesteaded a tract of farming land, when the husband and father sickened and died. He departed this life October 3d, 1826, and was buried in a puncheon coffin on the banks of Money Creek. The widow and orphans were left practically alone in the midst of a

wild prairie. But Mrs. Trimmer, remarkable woman that she was, rose to meet the trying conditions into which she was thus thrust, and with a bravery and fortitude worthy to be long commemorated by her descendants, raised her children to manhood and womanhood and made of them honored and useful members of society. She died April 7th, 1847, and was buried beside her husband's pioneer grave. The ground surrounding is now a beautiful cemetery.

The uniting of these two lines is next to be chronicled. Peter Best, though born in New Jersey, had grown up just across the Delaware in Northumberland County, Pa., where his parents located in his childhood. He came to be sturdy young yeoman of a vigorous and courageous type of manhood. As young men have always the habit, as much in one generation as in another, he went in those days a-wooing after a young maiden whose charms held his fancy and who in his judgment, well approved by later time, was pre-eminently the fittest of women to be his wife. It was his happiness to win the girl of his choice, and the consummation came when, on the 2d of January, 1823, at German Valley, N. J., Peter Best and Mary Trimmer were united in the bonds of holy matrimony.

They began wedded life in no affluent style. Hard work was their portion, and both accepted the lot with buoyant hearts and willing hands. They found a home on a rented farm near Hackettstown, N. J., which the young husband sturdily tilled the first year with the help of only one horse. Here John, the oldest son, came into the home one fall day, gladdening the parents' eyes with the sight of their first-born. In about a year the parents and their baby moved back to German Valley, and there they made their abode for eight years. The next four children were born in this home. Then their residence was changed again to New Germantown, N. J., which became the birthplace of four more children. A list of

the nine sons and two daughters of this revered couple—including the two youngest, who were born in Ohio—is here given, with their birth dates. These are here today the oldest generation:

Born in New Jersey	{	John	-	-	-	-	October 3d, 1823.
		William (deceased),	-	-	-	-	June 9th, 1825.
		Jesse,	-	-	-	-	January 7th, 1827.
		Jacob,	-	-	-	-	January 14th, 1829.
		Mary E.,	-	-	-	-	October 25th, 1830.
		David T.,	-	-	-	-	January 5th, 1832.
		Lydia E.,	-	-	-	-	May 20th, 1834.
		Ananias,	-	-	-	-	July 10th, 1836.
		Peter (deceased),	-	-	-	-	September 5th, 1838.
Born in Ohio	{	James,	-	-	-	-	October 25th, 1840.
		Sylvester,	-	-	-	-	January 30th, 1843.

It was in 1839 that the head of the household, in counsel with his wife, determined to seek a home in what was then regarded as the great, free West. They thought it better however not to penetrate so far into the new country as her parents had done, and they chose to locate in Ohio. The fall of 1839 found them crossing the Alleghenies overland in the fashion of the "movers" of the time. On October 3d, the birthday of the eldest son, the family passed over the Ohio River into the state wherein they had determined to settle. Their immediate objective point was the village of Gambier, near which place David Trimmer, the uncle of Mrs. Best, was then living.

With these kind relatives the mother and children stayed about a month, while the father prospected over the adjacent country for a suitable location. He finally decided on purchasing from Arthur Annett one hundred acres near Centerburg, in Hilliar Township, Knox County, the tract of land that in after years came to be known as the Best homestead. The family arrived on the site in November, 1839, and found shelter in a small log cabin already built on the land,

whose roof covered these hardy pioneers from the storm then and for several seasons thereafter. In the summer of 1846 or 1847, however, the cabin was supplanted by a more commodious and comfortable frame house on the same spot. This latter building, hallowed with a multitude of sweet and sad associations that accumulated through the years, still stands, within sight of the place where this reunion is held and this history presented. Though now not possessed by any one of the kinship, the house yet remains in the eyes of their descendants a sacred monument to Grandfather and Grandmother Best.

It was no light battle which Peter Best and his family undertook with the primitive surroundings and conditions of those days. But resolute, well directed, and unremitting labor won a victory from the encumbered, though bountiful, soil, and prosperity attended where thrift went before. The original hundred acres of land was added to until the farm came to comprise over twice that area. And the owner of the farm, meanwhile growing even richer in the esteem of his neighbors than in worldly goods, became, by his simple, straightforward, unbending manhood, a citizen of influence and a man held in exceptional confidence through an extended circle of friendship. Before he was very far advanced in years, the affectionate sobriquet of "Uncle Peter" was universally applied to him, and it clung to him so long as he lived. Albeit there is perhaps a louder meed of praise speaking for him in the perfect, loving respect which in his lifetime his own family always manifested toward him, and in the tender reverence in which his memory is still held by his surviving children.

His faithful helpmeet also, in the more limited but not less arduous sphere of her household duties, bore as brave and devoted a part in the establishment of the new home, and was as important a factor, through her frugal management, in winning the victories of early success. Adorning her daily life with

“the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit,” she made herself beloved by all who ever knew her for her sweet and kindly Christian graces. She ruled her children lovingly, and trained them for truth, honor and the right more by the power of her own pure example than by other means. And never was woman more truly enthroned than she in the affections of children and her husband.

The removal to Ohio served in that primitive time to separate Peter Best from his own relatives to a degree of isolation that we can scarcely realize in this day of easy intercommunication with friends. He practically lost knowledge of the whereabouts of his brothers and sisters, as they of his location. His oldest brother, John, who had settled near South Bend, Ind., visited him in his new home some time in the 40's, but apart from that visit our progenitor saw nothing of his own kin and heard no more for many years. At length by good fortune, Dr. Robert B. Rush, of Salem, Ohio, the son of Stephen and Mary Best Rush and through his mother nephew of Peter Best, lighted upon our branch of the family in the course of an effort to trace out his mother's lineage, and through his zealous services, mutual knowledge and acquaintanceship were restored along many almost obliterated lines of the wider family connection.

From Dr. Rush, Uncle Jacob Best, of Seneca Falls, N. Y., obtained the first knowledge he had had in decades of the whereabouts of his brother Peter. The longing to see him led Jacob, in the year 1869, to make his way, according to Dr. Rush's directions, to the village of Centerburg, where he was readily instructed how to reach the home of the brother he was seeking. He arrived at the homestead after dark, and walked into the sitting room unannounced. The two brothers had not seen each other for forty years, but mutual recognition lighted the faces of both on the instant. The scene is still remembered by the children who were there as one of the most affecting

in the history of the family and it seemed worthy to be specially commemorated here.*

The family home had not been many years set up in Ohio before the older children, grown to manhood and womanhood, began to leave that rooftree to hew out independent paths of life for themselves. Some married and settled down near home; some were attracted by various influences to other localities more or less remote. But the family circle was really never broken until the cruel hand of death tore it apart. First Peter, the seventh son, who had grown into a promising lad of fourteen, was taken. He died July 1st, 1853, and in his decease the homestead knew the presence of the first great sorrow that passed its doorway.

But that grief fell in no wise with such crushing force as did the bereavement which descended on the family when on the 22d day of July, 1856, the sweet mother, after months of suffering from the ravages of consumption, went away from the toil-worn, care-burdened body to rest forever in the presence of Him whom not having seen she loved. The day of burying away the familiar form was a day of blackness and darkness and almost of despair to those who mourned at the edge of her grave.

The elder daughter being already in a home of

*The usefulness of Dr. Rush's genealogical researches—for which he has long had a passion—should be further acknowledged in this pamphlet. Except for him the descendants of John Best, the eldest, should now be hopelessly ignorant of the collateral lines of the general family stock. It was by his aid that the committee planning for the reunion was enabled to communicate with some representative of each branch of the family, and so through him indirectly that we had the pleasure of welcoming at this reunion children of two of Peter Best's brothers—Mrs. Sarah Ellen Heck, of Tecumseh, Mich., the daughter of John Best, and Mrs. Bernice Gordon, of Sandusky, Ohio, the daughter of Jacob Best. The presence of Dr. Rush himself was eagerly hoped for, and only his age and feebleness prevented his coming. In his absence his grand-nephew, Mr. Robt. R. Wyant, who also is a descendant of Mary Best Rush and who came as the doctor's personal representative, was warmly welcomed.

her own, the household burdens now in the absence of the mother chiefly devolved upon the younger daughter, Lydia. She courageously accepted them and for years almost took the place of the mother in the house. She remained to care for the father until the old home was finally broken up by his death. From the strong manhood where he stood when his companion was taken from him, the father gradually descended into the valley of old age and withdrew, more and more as his years advanced, from active pursuits into the quiet retirement that befitted his time of life. At length, full of years and ready for God's eternal harvest, he quietly and peacefully fell asleep at the old homestead, on the 12th day of September, 1875, and his noble soul went to rejoin the loved helpmeet of his youth and to look upon the unveiled beauty of the Savior upon whom the full trust of his life was stayed. Tenderly did his children, in filial sorrow, lay the aged body with the mother's in the little graveyard on the border of Centerburg. There the mortal remains of both sleep and await the resurrection of the just.

The names of Peter and Mary Best are both recorded on the membership rolls of the Cumberland Presbyterian church of Rich Hill—the congregation now located in Centerburg. They joined the organization in 1853, and remained in consistent fellowship with that communion until their respective deaths.

All of the eleven children of this lovingly honored couple, save Peter, jr., grew to adult age and were married. One—William, the second son—was removed from wife and children in the very prime of his life—a lamentable visitation of pitiless death. The other nine survive to this centenary of their father's birth. John, Jacob, Mary, David, Lydia, Ananias, James and Sylvester are here to join in this celebration of the day. The only other child, Jesse, in such feeble health that he could not well come in person, is

doubtless present in spirit, remembering us here in full sympathy with this occasion.

There may appropriately be appended here some brief account of the individual lives of these brothers and sisters and of their families. All of them, it may be honestly said, have proved worthy and useful members of society, and each has taken a creditable and honored place among their fellow men.

John Best went to Champaign County, Ohio, in 1845, and has had his home there, in the vicinity of the village of Cable, ever since. There he met Miss Mary Jane Yocom, and they were married on November 29th, 1849. Three children were born to them: Enola Jane, (November 10th, 1856); Carrie Belle, (February 18th, 1859); John W. P., (September 27th, 1864). All are now married. The eldest daughter is Mrs. Staton E. Middleton; the second daughter, Mrs. David Perry. There are ten great-grandchildren in this branch of the family. "Aunt Mary Jane," after long suffering, passed away on August 17th, 1894.

William Best married Miss Sophia Houk, a neighbor girl, November 15th, 1846—the first marriage in the family. He and his wife settled down on a portion of the home farm and there remained until they died. Their children were Ananias Trimmer, (August 18th, 1847); Laura Josephine Isabel, (January 29th, 1849); Malissa Adaline, (September 4th, 1852); Peter Leroy, (June 22d, 1855); Mary Loella, (November 10th, 1858). This family has been sadly and sorely acquainted with death. Two of the children, Malissa and Peter, died in infancy before either was yet a year old—one on March 7th, 1853; the other on February 12th, 1855. The death of the former was the first death in the posterity of Peter Best. Then Ananias, the oldest of the family, a young man of splendid character and with fine prospects before him, departed this life, February 4th, 1873, in his 26th year. As before spoken of, the father fell asleep among his sorrowing wife, children, brothers and sisters, on September 12th, 1877. His

wife remained until March 22d, 1884, when she was laid beside him. So of the family, but the two daughters survive—Josephine and Loella. The former is now Mrs. Headington, the widow of the late John R. Headington, and the latter is Mrs. William A. Palmer. There are six great-grandchildren here.

Jesse Best went west in November, 1854. He stopped for that winter at Lexington, McLean County, Ill., with his mother's people, and then went on the next year to Clarksville, Iowa, where he made his home for eleven years. On November 30th, 1856, he was married to Miss Mary E. Spawr. They removed after the length of time above indicated to Neosho Falls, Kan. There their home has since been, the head of the household being engaged in farming. Their children are: Elizabeth Ellen, (September 10th, 1857); William James, (June 14th, 1859); Peter Sylvester, (October 30th, 1863; died November 20th, 1867); Lydia Olive, (September 25th, 1867); Jesse Jasper, (March 15th, 1871); Frank Leslie, (October 1st, 1875); Myrtle Imogene, (January 12th, 1878; died August 5th, 1878). Of the five living children, the two oldest are married, the daughter being the wife of Mr. Wm. Cooke. They are parents of seven great-grandchildren of Peter Best.

Jacob Best left home in the fall of 1853 and went to Lexington, Ill., attracted there like his brother Jesse a year later by the fact that his mother's relatives were there located. Jacob however was content to remain there. Entering the lumber trade after some years under favorable circumstances he became at length the proprietor of a very large business in partnership with Mr. S. S. Shade. He continued in this line until his retirement from active business in 1891. On February 24th, 1874, he was united in marriage with Miss Isabel Garrett. Their home was blessed with two children, Saidee Belle, born April 28th, 1875, and Leonard Garrett, born February 11th, 1877. As these olive plants grew up, the lives of the

parents came to be more and more enwrapped in the lives of the tenderly cherished daughter and son, and indeed the admirable development of womanly and manly graces in their happy, hopeful young hearts, well justified the pride which father and mother felt in them. But there never can be words framed to express the heart anguish that was brought, nor the lasting grief and loneliness which were left, by the stern, inscrutable providence which within a three years' space took both their darling treasures from their arms and made them childless. Saidee died June 29th, 1893; her brother Leonard had preceded her to the land very far off on November 9th, 1890.

Mary E. Best was married April 13th, 1854, at her parents' home, to Lemon Chadwick, of near Rich Hill. They lived in Ohio until 1868, when with three children they left this state for Kansas. They settled in Woodson County and remained there farming until about four years since, when they followed their children to Nevada, Missouri, where they now reside. Their family has included four children: Laura Adaline, (August 21st, 1855); Alson E., (August 2d, 1858); Annie Matilda, (November 12th, 1867); and Effie Ellen, (April 9th, 1871). Laura was married to James W. Ash, and they passed together ten happy years of wedded life. But their happiness had a most sorrowful end when on the 6th of January, 1897, Mrs. Ash died, leaving husband and four little children without her faithful help and tender, loving care. The recent desolation of this home can only elicit the sympathy of all the relatives. The three living children are also married. Annie is Mrs. C. W. Potter and Effie is Mrs. D. L. Strawderman. Alson chose the ministry as a life work and is preaching in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Twelve great-grandchildren are numbered here.

David T. Best was united in wedlock with Miss Susannah Adleman, January 4th, 1855. They made their home from their marriage on the farm of the

wife's father, adjacent to the Best farm on the west, and there the husband resides till the present day, having passed a placid and uneventful life tilling the soil of those familiar acres. Such lives are happy because they have no annals. His life companion was separated from him by the dark veil of death, in January, 1895—the first entrance of death into a home that for forty years had gone free from its blight. David's children are three: John Trimmer, (September 23d, 1855); Lydia Ellen, (December 9th, 1857); Wilbert Irvin, (July 21st, 1868)*. Ella and Will are married. The former became Mrs. Frank Gardner. Will is the father of three children in the third generation from the ancestor whom we commemorate today.

Lydia E. Best was married to John McGuire, on October 19th, 1880. They purchased a piece of land just north of the Best homestead tract, and there have lived a quiet, unstoried life since. Lydia has had no children, save step-children. Three at least of these have, however, been so closely identified with the family that they seem quite of the same kinship.

Ananias Best left the old home for Iowa, in 1861. He went to Clarksville, where his brother Jesse then lived, and settled there permanently, acquiring a farm and establishing a delightful home. He found a wife in the person of Miss Catherine R. McCreary, whom he married May 31st, 1863. They became the parents of two sons—Jacob Samuel, (March 8th, 1864), and John William, (August 7th, 1865)—both of whom grew to manhood, were happily married, and settled in pleasant homes in the community where they were raised. The father and mother, having given up the heavy duties of the farm, are living in retirement on a small plot of land near the village of Clarksville. Three great-grandchildren are counted here.

James Best, having decided that he should preach

*There is peculiar sorrowfulness in adding here that Wilbert died, after a brief illness, on May 22d, 1897—less than ten days after the reunion.

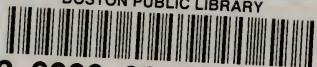
the gospel, secured a collegiate education in Waynesburg College, of Pennsylvania. He was ordained and admitted to the ministry of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1867. His first pastorate was over his home congregation at Rich Hill. While serving here he was married to Miss Narcissa M. Conner, of Cumberland, Ohio. He spent four and a half years at Rich Hill, and afterwards acceptably and successfully served different charges as follows: Leroy, Ill., one year; Centerville, Ind., and Bradford and Versailles, Ohio, twelve years; Logansport, Ind., three years; and Centerburg, Ohio, four years. Lately he has become identified with the Presbyterian denomination and he is now preaching to a congregation at Central College, Ohio. The home of the family is at Westerville, Ohio. Their children are Nolan Rice, (April 9th, 1871); Ernst Merton, (May 23d, 1875); and Mary Iva, (July 24th, 1880).

Sylvester Best, when a young man of 19, enlisted as a volunteer to go to the defense of his country's flag. He joined Company F, of the 121st Ohio Volunteer Infantry, and was made a corporal. He was mustered in at Camp Delaware, September 11th, 1862. His regiment saw some of the bloodiest fighting of the war, and he was always in the thick of the battle. At Kenesaw Mountain's fearful conflict on June 27th, 1864, he was wounded in such a manner as resulted in his being maimed for life—a mark now become a badge of honor. He was sent to a hospital at Nashville, where he remained for several months while his life hung in the balance. His father hastened to his bedside, and when he was strong enough to travel, brought him home, where he gradually recuperated his strength.

Sylvester was married on May 19th, 1866, to Miss Martha Annett. They lived for a time at Lock and at Sunbury, Ohio, where the husband followed the business of photography, which art he had learned after coming back from the war. Later, because he found this occupation detrimental to his health, he

abandoned it and decided to betake himself to farming. At his father's death, he bought a portion of the paternal estate, and from that time he has made his home upon it with his family. Upon his land it is that we meet today. This couple have had six children, of whom four are now living. It has been a particular affliction to them that both daughters have been taken from them. Their family record reads: Carrie Bernice, (March 29th, 1869; died October 24th, 1870); Sylvester Robert, (April 5th, 1872); Jesse Taylor, (May 1st, 1874); Charles Sherman, (February 10th, 1876); infant daughter, (November 26th, 1882; died November 27th, 1882); Guy Spenser, (August 19th, 1886).

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