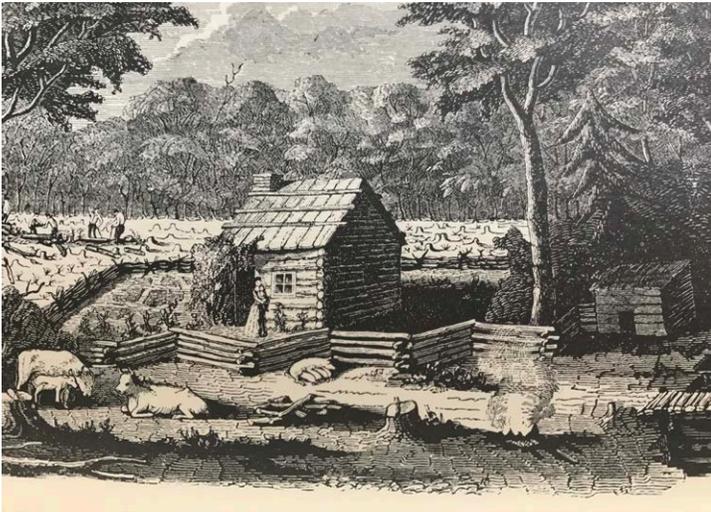


# Cynthia Franklin Pierson Olmsted



*This image was published in  
Turner's History of the Holland Purchase in 1850*

*"The pioneer has chopped down a few acres, enclosed them with a rail fence in front and a brush fence on the sides and in the rear. Around the house he has a small spot cleared of the timber sufficient for a garden . . . He has got a stick chimney added to his house . . . His wife has become a mother and with her first born in her arms, she is out, looking to the plants she has been rearing upon some rude mounds raised with her own hands. She has a few marigolds, pinks, sweet willisms, daffodils, sun flowers, hollyhocks; upon one side of the door, a hop vine and upon the other a morning glory. Knowing that when the cow came from the woods there would come along with her swarm of mosquitoes, she has prepared a smudge for their reception . . ."*

During this month of women's history, I'd like to remember our early pioneer women. Looking through the published histories, it is often frustrating to discover that these women are only identified by the men to whom they were related. They are "the daughter of . . . the wife of . . . the mother of . . . the sister of . . ." Their experiences are rarely recorded. I am apt to believe that they were too busy raising children, washing clothes, nursing the sick, and cooking to take the time to write about their lives. And perhaps they didn't think that they made much of a difference, but it was their strength, perseverance and tenacity that identified their generation. And I'd like to think that they passed their strength on to their daughters and granddaughters.

Cynthia Franklin was born on May 10, 1783 in Killingworth, Connecticut. Her mother Martha Pierson and her father, Ishi Franklin were married in 1772.

The Franklin family was large. Cynthia had eight brothers, Luther, John, Ishi, David, Daniel, Ruben, Warren and Silvarnus. And she had three sisters, Esther, Martha and Clarissa. Cynthia was the middle child. In 1804, on November 5, when Cynthia was twenty one, she married John Pierson. Their first daughter, Florilla was born in the first year. Soon the young family was on their way to the Genesee Country with John's bachelor brother, Philo. The trip took over three weeks and John wrote to his mother when they arrived near what is now Stone Church. "We got here the 23rd day of June. We stopped one day at Whitestown at Uncle Jonas Pamelee's. We had very good weather, no rain to hinder us . . . I have had the fever ague about fifteen days. I am now getting better. (The ague was a type of malaria, spread by mosquitoes, and was known as the Genesee Fever.) Cynthia has had a little of the ague. Florilla

has had something of the dysentery, but she has got well again and is now very hearty. Provisions have been very scarce but wheat comes in plenty - - land is now selling at twenty two shillings an acre. . . I wish you would bring Cynthia's spindle (spinning wheel) which we forgot." Cynthia and John lived in Stone Church for about two years and then moved to the town of LeRoy on a farm on Lake Road. In time, all six of the Pierson brothers arrived from Killingworth. His brother Simon in later life wrote many stories about the pioneer days on the frontier. One story about his wife Sylvia tells of a large rattlesnake that was discovered under her bed in their log cabin. John's mother arrived to visit her sons. She wrote a letter in 1812, telling of the "melancholy details" that befell the family. "John and Cynthia have been called to part with their eldest daughter Florilla. She was seized with a nervous fever in the head on the 9th of January and on the 17th of the same month, she expired." And the bad news continued with the story of Cynthia's brother Ruben, who was struck by a falling tree and suffered a brain injury. Cynthia and John also lost another daughter, Clarissa. Cynthia's mother-in-law intended to return to Killingworth, but she died in April 1813 and was buried in the Fort Hill Cemetery. As Rebecca wrote, it was a time of melancholy.

Late in 1813, in December the Niagara frontier literally exploded in war. The British held Fort Niagara. Madison had declared war and all able-bodied men volunteered for the militia. John and two of his brothers headed to Buffalo. They say that people in LeRoy could hear the cannons all the way from Buffalo. Simon had found someone to report for him, but somehow he learned that John was sick and he headed to Buffalo. He and Linus, found John, and after a lot of effort they were

able to bring their brother home. But John lived only a short time and died on January 2, 1814. He was only thirty. Cynthia was a widow with two children.

Within a short time, Cynthia married William Olmsted. He was a teacher and had arrived in LeRoy in 1812. Cynthia and William Olmsted had four boys and two girls. But tragedy continued. Harlow, her son by John, died in 1828 when the steamboat Washington caught fire in Lake Erie.

It's hard to know how Cynthia survived the vicissitudes of life. Imagine walking three weeks behind an ox cart, with all your belongings, with a young daughter, not knowing if illness would claim your family. Not knowing if you and your husband would be able to raise enough food to survive. Having babies and raising them in a log cabin, heated with a fireplace. Hauling water from a well to wash and clean and drink. Sewing shrouds to bury your children. Enduring the cold winter and rains of spring. Cleaning and carding enough wool from your sheep to spin into yarn that will make blankets and wool cloth. And watching your husband march off with the men from your neighborhood to fight in a war that will determine the future of the country. And knowing that as a married woman, you have no right to your husband's estate, nor can you own land, nor can you be guardians of your children.

Cynthia died November 4, 1875 at the age of 89. The funeral was held at her home on Lake Road. Rev. Dr. Taylor "paid an eloquent tribute to the pioneer fathers and mothers whose patient endurance and untiring energy had made the wilderness blossom like a rose. After alluding to the wonderful progress of history which had transpired during her remembrance, he called attention to the triumph of her faith in Christ, as manifested in her last hours. "Remember this lady.