

CHAPTER 1

“On Our Arrival West of the Mountains”

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF Daniel Parker, began to be written at the request of his family and friends, mostly from memory in the 64th year of his age, 1845.

I was born in Newburyport,¹ Mass., August 7, 1781. My father was a native of Malden, and my mother of Cape Ann, both in Massachusetts. His name was William;² hers, before marriage, Mary Warner.³ His father's family was large, consisting of six sons and six daughters. Of the Warner family, I remember none except two uncles, Ezekiel and William,⁴ the former a seafaring man, and the latter, an inmate of our family the greater part of his life, was partially insane, occasioned by the injury of the spine received by a fall.

My father was a cabinetmaker: served a seven-years apprenticeship in Charlestown⁵ near Bunker's Hill, and followed the business most of his life, teaching his sons the same occupation except the youngest. Having paid but little attention to pedigree, I am unable to trace my own far back. My ancestors came from England, and the name was probably derived from the occupation of keeping a park. I judge so from the fact that the coat of arms which hung in my father's house was a presentation of three bucks' heads of as many colors: red, black, and yellow, ornamented with green.

My parents had eleven children, four sons and seven daughters, having all, except the youngest, old fashioned names, in the following order according to age: Betsey Warner,⁶ William,⁷ Sally,⁸ John,⁹ Daniel, Polly,¹⁰ Nancy,¹¹ Suky,¹² Fanny,¹³ Ebenezer,¹⁴ Clarrissa¹⁵—none having

middle names but the oldest. All lived to be of mature age and are still alive (1845) except Suky and Clarrissa who have been dead many years. My mother died in 1811 and my father in 1826.

The earliest incident of my life that I can remember was falling down cellar¹⁶ while running through the house in the twilight, crying for my mother, who took me in her arms after being brought up much hurt. Being but seven years old when we left Newburyport, my recollection of the place is but slight. I remember, however, going to school, playing truant once, snow-balling with other little boys, sliding on small sleds down the hillside back of town (head foremost, steering with my toes), going of errands, eating gingerbread, seeing ships launch in the Merrimac River, and going to Mr. Murry's meeting.¹⁷

I can never forget, while retaining the faculty of memory, the tenderness and assiduity of my dear mother, who kindly restrained my waywardness and taught me little prayers and hymns while putting me to sleep in the trundle-bed. Maternal solicitude is seldom repaid by children.

My mother was of medium size, very comely in person, gentle in disposition, courteous in manners, attentive to the wants of others, beloved by all who knew her. Her skill in vocal music was extraordinary.

My father was of ordinary size, not handsome, though "good-looking"; of plain manners, very industrious and attentive to the wants of his family. He seemed to have a constitutional aversion to seeing human blood, as the following incident will shew. My sister Polly when a small child had her little fingers badly bruised while climbing over a pile of scantling, and bleeding profusely, was brought into his presence. On seeing the blood he rose to leave the room but fainted and fell backward on the floor.

Although my parents were not members of any church, they were religious, attending to both public and family worship, strictly observing the Sabbath and instructing their children in both the scriptures and catechism, being of the Presbyterian persuasion.¹⁸

In the fall of 1788 we removed from Newburyport in company with several other families to the western part of Pennsylvania. After a very tedious and expensive journey through many hardships, occasioned by bad roads and inclement weather, we arrived on the waters of the Monongahela about twenty miles above Fort Pitt (now Pittsburgh) a few miles northeast from the mouth of the Youghogena¹⁹—the Ohio

Company having settled in April of the same year at the mouth of the Muskingum.²⁰ In this company’s purchase my father owned a share consisting of 1500 acres of land,²¹ which was divided into different sized lots, located in various places, some along the banks of the Muskingum, others on the Ohio, but the larger portion about twelve miles south of the latter stream on the waters of Leading Creek in what is now Meigs County. His intention when leaving New England was to go on to his land the next spring, but before he could make the necessary preparations the Indian War broke out and continued until the treaty of General Wayne at Greenville in 1795.²²

On our arrival west of the mountains we found the country but little improved, and the people still less, dwelling in rude cabins constructed of round logs, covered with clapboard chinked with triangular hearts split off the clapboard stuff, and daubed with mud. The chimneys were made of what they called “cat and clay” in the following



Figure 1.1. *An American Loghouse*, Georges-Henri-Victor Collot, from *A Journey in North America* (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1826), plate 16. This print is based on one of Collot’s drawings from his travels in 1796 in the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi river valleys. (Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library)

manner. Mortar mixed with straw was worked into long rolls and laid round alternately with split sticks crossing at the corners and thus preventing the mortar from falling off, the mortar entirely covering the sticks and thus securing them from the fire, the whole resting on a pen of logs projecting from one end of the cabin to form the fireplace. The floors were made from split puncheons hewed on the upper side; the same material formed the door.

Oiled paper served as glass for the window (seldom more than one)²³ while the inside walls were lined round with the woman's dresses hung on wooden pins. A calico dress was a rare sight. They were generally made of linsey²⁴ and consisted of [a] petticoat and short gown, the latter reaching a little below the waist. A sunbonnet was the common headdress. When the women went to meeting they carried their shoes and stockings in their hands, and put them on before going into church. One might see them in all directions sitting about on logs attending to this adjustment. The men wore linsey hunting shirts, and either buckskin or linsey pantaloons. Fur hats and broadcloth coats were scarce as calico dresses.

It being late in November, snow having fallen, weather wet and cold, my father moneyless, with a family of eight children in a wilderness country, far from friends and without a house, our situation was melancholy enough. The first shelter we found in which to stow the family and goods was a hovel built of round logs, roofed indeed but without chinking, daubing, chimney, or floor. Having no bedsteads, we erected scaffolds with crotches, poles, and clapboards in the corners, hung round quilts and there put the beds. A large fire was built in the centre and bits of clapboards scattered about to keep our feet out of the mud, for when it rained the weather ran across the whole enclosure. We had driven out a flock of sheep belonging to the landlord before taking possession, and in this wretched place we lived one month, during which time my father put a shingle roof on the landlord's house, the first in that section of country, and received in part pay a bagful of sick wheat, which made us all sick before we knew there was such a thing as sick wheat.²⁵ My mother was blind for three days occasioned by the smoke. She was almost heart-broken when comparing her condition with what it had been, but there was no remedy, for we could not go back if we would.²⁶

At the month's end we found a few miles off a hut that had once been inhabited by human beings, but then was occupied by horses. After getting permission and cleaning out the manure, we found it had a floor. It had also chinking, daubing, and a chimney. Here we spent the remainder of the winter, in which time my sister Fanny was born.

It was not long till we heard of two New England families being in the neighborhood. Their names were Sheppard and Porter. Our families soon became intimate, and though strangers before seemed like relations to each other, and soon after settled for a short time near together. This intimacy was, however, soon broken off by their removal to Marietta in the state of Ohio.²⁷

For nearly seven years we had no permanent home for any considerable length of time, but moved about, living on rented land which we boys cultivated while our father worked at his trade. Between the two of us we made a comfortable living. During these seven years there was one of great scarcity, so that some families were without bread for many weeks, living on greens and milk—it being most serious in the spring and the fore part of summer, when the winter stock was exhausted. It happened that we had raised a good crop of beans the previous year, so that we did not suffer like many others. I remember of seeing my mother measure off to each child a small piece of Johnny Cake (Indian cornbread baked on a narrow board) and of putting my piece in a box, taking a small portion occasionally that it might last the longer.

My father, hearing that there was corn at Wheeling 100 miles down the river, went thither with some others in a canoe, found some at Mr. Zanes' (afterward proprietor of Zanesville), but he refused to let them have any, because they had money, giving as a reason that he was obliged to supply his poor neighbors who had no money. They returned without a bushel, commending the benevolence of Mr. Zanes to the poor.²⁸

Harvest approaching, Mr. John McKee (proprietor of McKeesport at the mouth of the Youghogena),²⁹ having a field of very early barley, gave out word that if the neighbors would come and reap it they might each have a grist, and pay him when they could. My father went and brought home a bagful, which made the sweetest bread we thought that ever was eaten.

I record these things that my children may be thankful for bread, and instead of wasting what they do not need, give it to the poor. I desire that they may never experience such privation, but should they, it will teach them a lesson of economy which perhaps they may now despise. The sin of Sodom was pride, occasioned by "fullness of bread and abundance of idleness."³⁰

Our next residence was on the west bank of the Monongahela opposite McKeesport in what was called "the neck." There we lived the last three of the years before mentioned, during which time the excise law was passed by congress, laying a tax on whiskey. The law was resisted and an insurrection ensued.³¹ An army was sent by General Washington, then president, to quell it. We were in the midst of the turmoil. Soldiers passed our house almost every day from one cantonment to another. The house of Presley Neville (excise master and afterward proprietor of Neville in Clermont County, Ohio) was only six miles distant. It was burnt by insurgents, and Mr. Neville escaped with difficulty to Fort Pitt.³² One Colonel Bradford was a leading man in that business. He made his escape down the Mississippi.³³ Others were caught, taken over the mountains and tried, but were all, I think, pardoned.³⁴ One distiller said, before the army came, [he] wished he had the heads of all the congressmen in his big still. Some, who were very noisy when there was no danger, soon hid like young partridges at the approach of the army.

At this place my brother Ebenezer was born. Here also the whole family, except Father, was inoculated and had the small pox vaccination, for kine pox was not then known in that country.³⁵

My father, becoming tired of living on other men's land and not thinking it prudent to settle on his own in Ohio, which was then a wilderness, there being an uncertainty whether peace with the Indians (although the war was closed) would continue, bought a small place of some twenty acres in the "Forks of the Yough," eight miles up and one mile south of the Youghogena river. On that little place we resided seven years. There my youngest sister was born.

Having a home of our own in a very healthy situation, we began to be quite reconciled to the country, which was much improved, as were also its inhabitants, compared with what they were when we first came to the west. We had excellent neighbors, the greater part professors of



Figure 1.2. In a painting attributed to Frederick Kemmelmeyer (after 1795), *George Washington Reviews the Western Army at Fort Cumberland, Maryland*. The troops depicted would have been part of a massive contingent that President Washington led into western Pennsylvania to quash the Whiskey Rebellion in 1794. Daniel Parker, thirteen years old at the time, witnessed soldiers passing his house every day during the crisis. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

religion, belonging either to the Presbyterian, Covenanter, or Seceder Church. [They] were plain and honest, open-hearted farmers, mostly of Irish descent.³⁶ They used some very singular words in conversation, such as:

“Fenent” for “opposite.”

“Hanan” for “what did you say?”

“Till” for “to” and “to” for “till”: as, “Are you going till the meeting? Well, wait to I get ready.”

“Swither” for “quandary”: as, “I am in a swither what till do.”

“The morrow” for “tomorrow.”

“Be to be” for “has to be.”

“Childer” for “children.”

“Hit” for “it,” with many others not remembered.

It was customary when religious people met for worship to kiss each other, doubtless intending to obey the injunction in First Corinthians 16:20, "Greet ye one another with a holy kiss." Baptists and Methodists were scarcely known in that section, and but little theological controversy. One instance of religious disturbance, however, I recollect, occasioned by the preaching of Mr. Black from Fort Pitt, who was a very talented man, a rigid Covenanter and of course strenuously opposed to singing Watts' psalms in worship (calling them counterfeit psalmody). He had drawn away a number of Mr. Henderson's congregation who were Seceders. I recollect a sermon of Mr. Henderson designed to counteract the influence of Mr. Black. His text was in Solomon's Songs—these words: "Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes." In alluding to the nature of a fox, he said that the most mischievous of foxes, according to the opinion of the historians, were the *black* foxes, the shrewdness of this remark fixed it in my memory.³⁷

With our little farm and cabinet shop we procured a very comfortable living, but could make no surplus. My father being far advanced in years, my elder brother having left home and gone to Marietta, the place too small, and nearly destitute of timber and the soil much worn, Brother John and myself urged our aged parent to sell out and move down to his land while we were yet with him, promising to stay until he should be comfortably settled, to which after much persuasion he reluctantly consented.

We had rented a sawmill and followed building flat boats, which were then called "Kentucky boats," being used principally by emigrants moving to that state then in a course of rapid settlement. We accordingly commenced preparing to build two boats to convey the family goods and stock. The very first day my brother John took sick and was unable to work for one year. The burden falling upon me, and hating to give up, I went to the woods next day and did about two common days' work. I soon found that would not answer, and wrote immediately to my brother William, requesting him to come to my assistance. He did so, and we finished the boats in time to move in the spring of 1802. Previously to leaving, our shop caught fire and was consumed together with all the tools, stuff, and considerable furniture. This was a great misfortune as the trade was our main dependence.

About the same time another severe trial occurred. My brother John had, unknown to the rest of the family, been laboring under great concern of mind on the subject of a future state. Having been brought up to believe the doctrine of partial election and reprobation, supposing himself to be one of those for whom Christ did not die, he was driven almost to despair, but concealed his trouble as much as possible.³⁸ One day as my mother was walking near the verge of a deep hollow not far from the house, she heard the sound of a human voice coming up from the bottom of the ravine, and approaching the spot she discovered her son on his knees in prayer. They both returned to the house in tears. He then told us that he had been for many months tempted to commit suicide and was praying for strength to resist the temptation when our mother found him, that he had been afraid to handle any implement by which he might commit the dreadful act.

This unexpected and extraordinary development produced a deep impression on all, but especially on me, as we were intimate companions in everything. I then recollected of his refusing some time before to go a short distance for the cows unless I would go with him. I said it was not worthwhile for two to go, as the bell was within hearing. I could go myself if he would not. This was said in a pettish mood. While at the time I thought strange of his refusing, as he was generally more willing to do any such thing than I was. On reminding him of this afterward, he said the reason of his refusing was a fear that he might see a grape vine and be tempted to hang himself. I felt the sting of self-reproach, and in future was very careful not to leave him alone.

In the midst of these discouragements, we embarked for the state of Ohio and arrived without accident at the mouth of Leading Creek the eleventh of April, 1802. The river being very high, we floated our boats up the backwater six miles, found a smaller settlement and met a hospitable reception from the few inhabitants who had gone before us. We had then to cut a road six miles farther, following a section line to find the land.

Leaving most of the family at the settlement (now called Rutland), my elder brother, uncle William Warner, and myself commenced operations on the land. Our first object was to construct a temporary shelter of puncheons to live in till we could build a cabin. In cutting for this purpose a small buckeye, I lodged it against another tree, and while

in the act of cutting the latter, it suddenly broke loose above and I only had time to step out of my tracks when it came down exactly where I had stood.³⁹ Thus my life was preserved from imminent peril.

By the help of kind friends from Rutland, we raised and covered our cabin and, without waiting to finish it, moved the family out. Thus after the lapse of nearly fourteen years from the period of our leaving New England, we found ourselves for the second time located in a new country, less improved than that in Pennsylvania, to which we first emigrated. There were no neighbors except one within six miles distance eastward. On the north, twenty miles off, was Athens. About the same distance on the south was Gallipolis. And on the west twenty-five miles was the Scioto Salt Works (now the town of Jackson).

Almost the whole territory included within these points was one unbroken wilderness. Wild game was abundant. One could scarcely walk a mile without seeing deer or turkeys and occasionally a bear. It was therefore but little trouble to obtain supplies of animal food. We had taken with us a good supply of flour and of course we had no lack of substantial provision for one year at least. Wild pea vine covered the ground with rich food for cattle, so we had plenty of milk. By extremely hard work, often continued after night, we cleared, fenced, and planted in corn and vegetables, about three acres of ground that season. Some was planted in July. This part of Ohio had been a great hunting ground for the Indians, and Leading Creek, it is said, was so named on account of having been the leading route in passing from their northern towns to the mouth of Kenhawa.⁴⁰ Deer being still very numerous, they often spent the fall season hunting near and once encamped on my father's land about two miles off.⁴¹ They were very friendly and honest, would bring us venison to exchange for vegetables, and always fulfilled their promises. I wish this could be said of our government toward them.⁴²

My brother William, having kindly assisted us in moving and settling, was soon after married and located in Marietta. Brother John's health remained delicate, and being still unable to work, the younger brother but a child, a large portion of care and labor devolved on me. In addition to farming work, I had to make all our coarse shoes for a number of years, there being no shoemaker near us. [We often wore] moccasins in the summer.⁴³

After I was of age, my custom was to help my father occasionally in summer and work for myself in winter, my younger brother being unable to manage the place. Although we soon had obtained a plentiful supply of grain, there were no mills nearer than twenty miles, and those horse mills. We had therefore to grind our corn for six years on a hand mill or go that distance. It may not be amiss for those who never saw a hand mill to have it described. The stones were some twenty to twenty-four inches in diameter, about four inches thick, some not that. They were furrowed on the face slightly, hung as mill stones usually are, and on the outer edge of the upper one was a small hole into which a gudgeon driven, into [which] a pole was inserted, the upper end of the pole passing through a hole in a board overhead loosely. The runner was turned round by one hand grasping the lower end of the pole while the other supplied the mill with corn.

Our stock of flour brought from Pennsylvania being exhausted, I once took my young brother with two horses and what wheat they could carry, took our own harnesses, went twenty miles to a horse



Figure 1.3. This picture of “women grinding corn in Ireland” from the *Illustrated London News* (1870) depicts a hand mill, also called a quern, fitting Daniel Parker’s description.

mill in Virginia, fording the Ohio River on the way at the foot of Eight Mile Island, attended to the grinding, bolted it by hand, and gave one quarter for toll. Short cakes were then a luxury and tasted all the better for being dearly bought. We paid in those days fifty cents per pound for coffee and two dollars for tea and two dollars a bushel for salt (fifty pounds) and had to pack it from the Scioto Salt Works twenty-five miles through the woods.⁴⁴ [We made] our own sugar.⁴⁵ Our suppers generally consisted of mush and milk or bean broth and we had neither dyspepsia nor doctors. A lawyer would have starved to death if he had depended for a living on his profession. When visitors came, which was seldom, they generally stayed all night. If they had horses, we spancellor them, that is, tied their forelegs about a foot apart, put a bell on, and turned them loose in the woods where the pea vine was up to their eyes. In the morning they would be found probably within one half a mile of the place we left them.

Nobody visited for mere etiquette but all for friendship. No quarreling among neighbors for they lived too far apart. Tattling and scandal were uncommon as luxurious living. Nobody's pigs, fowls, or cattle troubled us but our own, and we made them pay for what they got by furnishing us with meat and milk. When we had no candles; fire light made with pine knots supplied their place. Having no newspapers nor periodicals and but few books, we read what we had the oftener and with greater attention. There being no schools, the children were instructed at home, and no fault to find with the schoolmaster. No one was alarmed about having their money stolen because they had none to lose. The poor did not envy the rich, as nobody had riches. Deprived of many conveniences we relished with greater zest what we had. We seldom heard preaching, but often attended the Sabbath social religious meetings at Rutland. Providence was kind and we were healthy and thankful. The men-folks raised and dressed large quantities of flax, and my sisters spun and wove it into cloth, the surplus of which was exchanged at Gallipolis for store goods after the family wants were supplied.⁴⁶

On one occasion I accompanied my oldest sister thither for the purpose of exchange, and while returning, night came on before we reached our intended stopping place. It being very dark and the path obscure, we were soon entangled among the bushes, and though within

hearing of dogs, could not make ourselves be heard by their owners. So wrapping up with our new goods and tying the horses, we sat down by a tree and stayed till morning.

One very extraordinary occurrence took place shortly after our settlement on Leading Creek. My uncle William, though imbecile in mind, was strong and healthy in body, very peaceful and industrious, and could perform common labor that required little judgment. He was one evening at work a short distance from the house, grubbing some bushes, when a deer came bounding by and ran up the front of a ridge, leading westward, in which direction there was no inhabitant for twenty-five miles.

The beauty and agility of the animal attracted his attention so strongly that he followed it some distance for the pleasure of seeing it run. But on attempting to return, the curvature of the ridge deceived him; and taking a different spur from that he went up, traveled directly from home. At dark he came not in, and a tremendous storm of rain, thunder, and lightning in the night prevented our making much search till next morning. We then procured what assistance we could and scoured the county in every direction, making all the noise possible with guns, horns, and hallooing, but to no purpose. Continuing the search one week without success, he was given up for dead.

In twenty-four days from the time of his departure he was found by some hunters near the Scioto Salt Works and taken thence in the most deplorable condition, though still alive. Fortunately for him, a very kind family by the name of Everts took him in, and by the most careful attention restored him sufficiently to be brought home, but in a state of wild distraction. Being, however, gradually recovered, his mind became more sane than before he went away, and continued so several months. During this lucid interval he informed us of what he had suffered—that he lived on roots and berries (it being the month of July); that he killed and ate raw a pole cat or possum (I disremember which); that he sometimes slept in caves, traveling mostly at night for fear of wild beasts finding him while asleep; that in addition to his intense suffering from hunger, he was bitten by a snake on his heel, which was still in a sad condition after his return. He was absent about one month. [He] died at my father’s house many years afterward.