

PRISCILLA COLBATH

THE GRAND OLD LADY OF PASSACONAWAY PASSES ON

The death of Mrs. Priscilla Ruth Colbath at Memorial Hospital last Saturday removes from among us one of the most interesting figures in this section. To all who know Passaconaway intimately, her passing seems a personal loss, but their sincere regret is tempered by resignation when they realize that for her has come release from pain, illness, and all the cares and worries that living alone, far from all social contact, during our long New England winter, must bring to a person of eighty, no matter how efficient and resourceful. She rests within sight of the encircling mountains which have been round about her for eighty years, and with which her life in its quiet, rugged, simplicity, its stability of purpose, and its sturdy independence, had been in closest harmony.

Passaconaway and its charm were in her blood. She was a product of the valley, for her grandfather, Austin George, was the first settler coming there from Massachusetts in 1804 in the hope of finding a place where his family might find physical healing and escape from the deadly scourge of consumption.

A few Indians still remained, and the woods then were filled with game. Later Thomas Russell came from Bartlett and Austin George moved to that township. Other families settled in Passaconaway which was known as Swift River Intervale and Eliza George came back from Bartlett to teach the school which was established for the children. She married Amazi

Russell, the son of the pioneer, Thomas, and remained to be his faithful helpmate. Of their five daughters, all but one, Priscilla Ruth, left for homes in distant places. Her father was a well known lumberman whose mills were busy places and whose teams took the products as far as Portland, and brought back supplies for the merchants of Conway.

In her youth the valley was a populous place. As time went on the settlers died and their children moved to the larger places. Passaconaway was almost deserted. A few of the old families remained, and a few people attracted by the wonderful scenic beauty of the region established summer homes. Her parents had died, their faithful daughter had married and been left alone, but she stayed on at the old home. In 1906 a logging railroad opened up the region and brought it into prominence. Before this Mrs. Colbath had been postmistress for fifteen years a change being made in 1907. Her office had brought her into intimate contact with summer residents and many pleasant friendships resulted. Her knowledge of the early history of the section, her broad intelligence, and her pleasing personality made her an agreeable and interesting companion.

More than thirty camps have been built on her lands and in summer she had no lack of company. A telephone put her in communication with the outside world and she had no desire to leave her lifelong home. At one time a period of twelve years elapsed without her leaving the valley. In the winters she has been, sometimes, the only resident of the region except an occasional hunter in a camp and her good neighbor, Ben Swinton who has seen that her woodpile was replenished and has done her shopping at the village stores at Conway.

For several months her health has been failing and a fortnight ago her physician, Dr. C. M. Wiggin, urged her to go to the hospital for care and treatment. She was taken there by Cecil Head and Dr. Wiggin, in Mr. Head's ambulance and died there Saturday morning. Funeral service were held in the Congregational Church at Conway, Monday afternoon. The Rev. Charles Moorhouse paid a well deserved tribute to the endearing qualities of the grand old lady and Mrs. Alice Evans sang the beautiful old hymns "Rock of Ages" and "Nearer My God to Thee" very sweetly. Beautiful flowers shed their fragrance above the sweet face that was soon to be seen no more by mortal eyes and she was borne away to sleep her last long sleep beside her ancestors.