

The Chapman-Drake Family Plot

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REL 167W: Speaking Stones

Israel Chapman (1786-1875), father
Charity Chapman (1790-1863), mother
Israel Chapman, Jr. (1832-1856), son
Alden B. Drake (1822-1854), son-in-law
and other family members

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Abstract: Description of the Chapman and Drake families, focusing on Israel Chapman's contributions to early Chili, NY, as well as descriptions and interpretations of the gravestones of all members of plot. Includes: Israel Chapman (1786-1875); Charity Chapman (1790-1863); Israel Chapman, Jr. (1832-1856); Alden B. Drake (1822-1854); Emma Drake and Jessie V. Drake, infant deaths

Upon the side of a hill in plot E ½ 35 H of Mt. Hope Cemetery, members of the Chapman and Drake families lay interred. Though the stones and the family are forgotten to public memory, their contributions to their community were immense, and indicative of a by-gone era. Indeed, the family patriarch, Israel Chapman, Sr., came to Chili, NY in 1806. Coming from Connecticut, he was one of the early pioneers to the Chili area, and has made his mark on his family and his community. Despite this, neither his gravestone, nor the gravestones of his wife, son, and son-in-law are ostentatious. Plain, though large in stature, they feature verses and short statements, but lack in any iconography. Most of the evidence that these people lived has been lost over time. Their final resting places, therefore, act as the last true relics of their lives.

Six burials have occurred in the plot, to date. The plot includes the following family members:

Alden B. Drake, died on January 14, 1854, aged 32 years old
Israel Chapman, Jr., died on July 8, 1856, aged 23 years old
Charity Chapman, died on October 24, 1863, aged 72 years old
Emma Drake, interred on March 8, 1872, aged 1 month and 14 days old
Israel Chapman, Sr., died on January 13, 1875, aged 88 years old
Jessie V. Drake, interred on May 8, 1881, aged 1 year, 8 months, and 25 days old

Ann Drake, who was both the daughter of Israel Chapman, Sr., and the wife of Alden B. Drake, purchased the plot for the purpose of burying her husband. Alden, unlike his wife, did not hail from a pioneering family. On the contrary, he worked as a carder at S.C. Jones' Cotton Mill, and lived on Ann Street in the city of Rochester.¹ Working in a mill, Alden participated in industrial life, as opposed to the agricultural small town setting to which the Chapman family contributed. As a carder, Alden worked day in and day out pulling seeds from cotton, preparing it to become fabric. This was a strenuous job, and could have contributed to his illness and eventual death.

¹ *Daily American Directory of the City of Rochester For 1847 – 8*, (Rochester: Jerome & Brother, 1847), 101.

When Alden died on January 14, 1854, of a bowel infection, he left behind his wife, as well as their two children, Emma and Alden, Jr. None of Alden's immediate relatives with whom he lived are buried in the plot. However, two of his infant grandchildren, the children of his son, are buried alongside adults within the plot. No markers memorialize these infants, and the only reminder of their existence is in the Mt. Hope Cemetery plot books.



Figure 1, Gravestone of Alden B. Drake

A simple, yet poignant gravestone marks Alden B. Drake's resting place. Only a three word epitaph decorates his stone, aside from a simple border, date of his death, and his age at death. It reads:

WE'LL MEET AGAIN

Short and sweet, it is likely that his wife chose this epitaph, since she also bought the plot. These simple words affirm the belief in life after death on the part of Alden's wife. The mental images that the epitaph created might have helped Ann Drake to grieve through the death of her husband, lessening the tragic mourning associated with the death of a young spouse, and replacing it with hope for a future together in the afterlife. Through his epitaph we gain a sense of the idea of theological immortality. Indeed, "[t]he common thread in all great religions is the spiritual quest and realization of the hero-founder that enables him to confront and transcend

death and to provide a model for generations of believers to do the same.”² This belief in Jesus, resurrection, and the afterlife most likely provided solace to the family members of Alden B. Drake upon his death.

The Chapman family experienced a similarly tragic death only two years later, on July 8, 1856, when Israel Chapman, Jr., a son of Israel Chapman, Sr., died of *bilious fever* or what we now call *typhus*. This sudden death came only three months after what we can only presume was a joyous occasion. Just three months prior to his death, Israel Chapman, Jr. married Miss Mary Ann Miniss of Rochester, NY. Celebrating their marriage at St. Ann’s Church in Brooklyn, they embarked upon their life together, not knowing that tragedy would strike in such a short amount of time.³ We know little of his young widow, who probably remarried and changed her name. The short marriage of Israel, Jr. and Mary Ann make this story all the more tragic.

Israel, Jr.’s epitaph is short, much like Alden B. Drake’s. It reads:

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Short and to the point, this epitaph strikes at the tragic nature of his death, since parents never forget their children, just as a widow never forgets her spouse. The parents, siblings, and widow of Israel, Jr. most likely chose this epitaph as a reminder that even though Israel had parted from their lives, he would live on for them through their memories of him.

² Robert Jay Lifton, “Approaches and Modes,” *The Broken Connection* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1983), 20.

³ “Marriage Notice for Israel Chapman and Mary Ann Miniss,” *Rochester Daily Union* (Rochester, 1856).

In addition to the similarity of Alden and Israel, Jr.'s epitaphs, the stones are also identical in shape, stature, and font. The carver must have been the same, though, unfortunately, this information has not survived in the historical record. One might note that there are other stones in Mt. Hope Cemetery identical to those of Alden and Israel, Jr., so the carver may have been popular at the time. However, by the time Charity died eight years later, the stones had changed in style, though the font stayed regular throughout all four stones.

The stones of Alden and Israel, Jr. stand at the borders of the plot, providing for a sense of symmetry. Between the two lay buried Israel Chapman, Sr. and his wife, Charity Chapman. The two were likely wed in Connecticut, since both were



Figure 2, Gravestone of Israel Chapman, Jr.

born there.⁴ Israel, Sr. likely arrived in Chili ahead of his wife. As one of the first settlers to the area, Israel, Sr. helped clear Buffalo Rd.,⁵ and settled an area which came to be known as Chili Center, though, throughout his lifetime and a little beyond, it was known as Chapmans Corner. Chili Center/Chapmans Corner is located at the intersections of Chili Ave., Chili Center – Coldwater Rd., and Paul Rd., in Chili, NY. Coming to the area so early, he gained influence and

⁴ 1855 Census of Monroe County, acquired from genealogy.com

⁵ "Another Pioneer Gone," *Union and Advertiser* (1875).

EARLY CHILI RESIDENTS (1822 or before)

Many of Chili's earliest settlers are identified here by their approximate landholding sites. These locations have been determined through a cross reference process. No actual map of this type for this pioneer Chili period has been found during the 1972 Sesqui-centennial study. For that reason, accuracy in particular cases may be limited to approximations.

These known names have been superimposed upon the basic road structure of Chili as it existed in about the year 1900.

Carl C. Moore, Jr.

A sketch of Chili area roads as they existed in 1900 depicts the layout of families living in Chili, NY before 1822. This helps to confirm that Chili Center was called Chapmans Corner in Israel's time, since many Chapmans are indicated at that location.⁶ Earliest settlers to Chili would have made small shelters in the dirt, but "[i]nstead of a lone effort to build a 'dugout' or similar temporary shelter, a collective effort could erect something permanent. Together the men of the vicinity could handle the full grown trees needed for a house's sturdy beams."⁷ Since Israel came with family and they settled in close proximity to each other, as evidenced by the

⁷ Moore, Jr., *Chili Chapters*, 5.

map, they most likely built their homes rather quickly, or at least faster than the earliest settlers to Chili in the late eighteenth century.

As the town grew in size in the early nineteenth century, official duties and public office arose for the purpose of keeping order in the burgeoning town. One such duty was that of highway overseer, also known as a pathmaster. As more families settled in Chili, the community leaders divided the town into many districts, and put one member of each district in place as highway overseer of their district. Duties included making sure that roads were clear, smooth, and even, with the desired goal of facilitating travel by wagon and carriage. Highway overseers needed to possess superior leadership qualities since “[h]e was responsible for marshalling the efforts of all male residents of his district toward keeping the road in good repair.”⁸ However, if a pathmaster neglected his duties, he would not hold the office the following year, and would lose his prominence in society.⁹

If we operate under this theory, we can understand Israel Chapman, Sr. as a prominent and respected member of the Chili community for some time. Israel, Sr. held the position of pathmaster for his district in 1815, 1826, 1830, 1833, 1834, and 1836.¹⁰ We can draw several conclusions about Israel Chapman given that he performed the duties of pathmaster in his community. First of all, it is likely that in his district other male family members acted as pathmaster, switching from year to year. Additionally, we see that Israel never holds the title of pathmaster again after 1836. Indeed, an incident occurred with a neighbor in 1836, which very likely decreased his power and respectability from the point of view of the community around him. On July 11, 1836, Israel was charged with trespassing for letting his hens “scratchet” on his

⁸ Moore, Jr., *Chili Chapters*, 29.

⁹ Conversation with Bonnie Moore, Chili Town Historian, on November 20, 2012.

¹⁰ Chili records of public office holders.

neighbors land. The hens pulled up the neighbor's corn, and he was ordered to pay \$7.50 in damages.¹¹ This incident is likely the reason that Israel never held the post of pathmaster after 1836. His grandson, Alden Drake, Jr., however, reprised the role in 1872, perhaps making an old man proud and assured of his legacy at the old age of 85.

Aside from his civic duties, Israel Chapman, Sr. was both a farmer and hotel proprietor. Little is known of his farming life, except that most residents of Chili at the time were farmers. However, we know that in 1833, Israel, Sr. followed a growing trend and obtained a hotel license.¹² He and his son, Pierpont, were likely proprietors of the structure that later become the Nichols House, an inn and tavern located at Chili Center/Chapmans Corner until it was demolished in the late 1960s. The business, despite the over abundance of other hotels, succeeded even past Israel's time on this earth, perhaps shedding light on Israel as a savvy business owner. In such a competitive market, the longevity of his business is striking.

Like all good members of the Chili community, Israel, Sr. and his family participated actively in religious life. He and his family were founding members of the Chili Calvinistic Baptist Society, which later became the First Baptist Church of Chili, a congregation still in existence today. The Chapmans had an important role in the legal formation of the church, since the meeting held for this purpose occurred at their home on September 16, 1854. Indeed, the Chapmans offered their own land for the church, and so the Baptist Church of Chili's first location was at Chapmans Corner. While the church burned down in the early twentieth century, it is located down the street on Chili Ave. in the present day. The Chapmans remained tied to the

¹¹ Carl C. Moore, *Hidden Strands From the Fabric of Early Chili*, (Chili: Carl C. Moore, 1976), 100.

¹² Moore, *Hidden Strands*, 59-60.



Figure 4, Gravestone of Israel Chapman, Sr.

church at least until Israel, Sr.'s death, since the funeral services for Israel, Jr., Charity, and Israel, Sr. were held at the location.¹³

The gravestones of Israel Chapman, Sr. and Charity Chapman reflect their religious views in a poetic and symbolic way.

Additionally, they reflect their family ties through the markers "OUR FATHER" and "OUR MOTHER." In this way, the children of Israel, Sr. and Charity make it known to all who walk by that their parents were significant in their lives and made their mark on the

world, if in no other way, then through their family. Israel, Sr.'s epitaph reads:

I WOULD NOT LIVE ALWAY, NO WELCOME THE TOMB
SINCE JESUS HATH LAIN THERE I DREAD NOT ITS GLOOM
THERE SWEET BE MY REST TIL HE BID ME ARISE
TO HAIL HIM IN TRIUMPH DESCENDING THE SKIES

¹³ "Another Pioneer Gone," *Union and Advertiser*, (January 14, 1875); "Charity Chapman's Obituary," *Union and Advertiser*, (October 24, 1863), and "Israel Chapman, Jr.'s Obituary," *Rochester Daily Union*, (July 8, 1856).

This verse comes from a hymn called “I Would Not Live Alway,” which references Job 7:16, “I loathe it; I would not live alway: let me alone; for my days are vanity.” The music of the hymn is sweet, yet solemn. It is fitting for Israel, Sr., a man who lived to be 88 years old, dying only of natural causes. He had likely come to terms with his own death at this point, through a belief in resurrection and life after death. In addition, the hymn refers to the time in the grave as rest while waiting for salvation, as opposed to permanent annihilation. The hymn embodies the theme of death itself as a journey, from entering the tomb to the arrival of Jesus.¹⁴



Figure 5, Gravestone of Charity Chapman

Charity, who died of dysentery, has an epitaph that also reflects her religious views, but it might also reflect a greater theme of her life:

¹⁴ George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 4.

THEN LET US HUSH THE RISING SIGH
AND BID AFFECTIONS TEARS TO DRY
OUR MOTHER LIVES HER SORROWS OER
WHERE WE SHALL MEET TO PART TO MORE

Charity's epitaph does not resemble any others, and from where it comes, we cannot be certain. It does, however, affirm the belief in an afterlife, or a heaven, more specifically, where she and her children will meet again. The choice of the word "sorrows" is peculiar. It implies that Charity suffered during her life. Indeed, this would not be surprising. Charity gave birth to at least seven children, and who knows how many miscarriages or infants she lost during her life.¹⁵ Additionally, she lost her son Israel when he was only 23, perhaps a striking moment in her life that changed her forever. Whatever the meaning, it is clear that her children chose the epitaph, and that they believed they would see their mother again. Only in heaven, could Charity escape the sorrows of the natural world, and be with every member of her beloved family.

Two more burials occurred in the plot, those of Emma Drake and Jessie V. Drake. Emma and Jessie V. were most likely buried alongside other members of the plot to save space. Their deaths have not been memorialized in any way, though their names are written down in the interment records and the plot books of Mt. Hope Cemetery. Unfortunately, it was common to have unmarked infant burials in a plot, since infant mortality rates were much higher than today. Emma, died of congestion of the lungs, and Jessie V. died of meningitis, diseases that took them from their parents too soon.¹⁶

It would seem that the Chapmans' story ends here, however, in 1937, Irene Drake Rodwell, the daughter of Alden Drake, Jr., and sister of Emma Drake and Jessie V. Drake, made

¹⁵ "Another Pioneer Gone."

¹⁶ Mt. Hope Cemetery Interment Records.

contact with Mt. Hope Cemetery. Irene wished to know the current state of the plot and if it needed care. In her initial letter, addressed to the Mayor of Rochester asking for a referral to the proper authorities, she states that her great grandfather, grandfather, and two sisters are buried in a plot in Mt. Hope Cemetery. She writes as if she has never visited the plot. In a later letter, she states that she actually had a premonition that the plot was in disarray. Whether her premonition was supernatural or not, indeed, upon inspection, it was realized that three of the stones lay flat on the ground. The only stone remaining upright was that of Israel Chapman, Jr., her great uncle. Unfortunately, when Mt. Hope Cemetery asked her if she could contribute \$200 to the care of the plot, she made it known that her aunt, Mrs. Alvin Hulbert, better known to us as Emma Drake, daughter of Alden B. Drake, had made off with all of her father's money. Furthermore, Mt. Hope Cemetery did not hear back from Mrs. Alvin Hulbert at all, until 1940, when her daughter, Jessie, responded that Emma had died, and that she had not wanted any of the money to go to the care of the plot, not that any money was left.¹⁷

Somehow, these stones all stand today, for reasons unknown. Perhaps they were raised as a result of the Friends of Mt. Hope, some of whose volunteers reset fallen stones. In any case, the declining care of the plot in the 1940's is perhaps indicative of a decline in prominence for the Drake line of the Chapman family. Not only had the family declined financially, from these letters we know that the family had moved farther west, to Ohio and California. Leaving behind their ancestral roots, the grandchildren of Israel Chapman, Sr. ended a family tradition of community involvement in Chili, and moved on. This is more indicative of a shift in societal values, than the amount of love they had for their family.

¹⁷ Mt. Hope Cemetery Plot Books.

Indeed, Carl C. Moore, Jr., author of *Chili Chapters: A Condensation of Chili History Based Primarily on Town Records*, best sums this up during a discussion of the importance of studying a community's cemeteries:

The village cemetery, seen as a mosaic therefore, shows much that a community was and to a surprising degree (perhaps by implication if in no other way) predicts what it will be. Fitted together intermittently by the unwilling heirs of tragedy this human drama is recorded in a community cemetery as a multitude of individual heartbreaks crowded together by a hundred years into a single historic picture.

Usually it is left there perhaps upon the village green, or to hide among the tangled weeds where names from various generations become intermingled and identities are lost forever among the greater whole. Either way it becomes yours for what you will see or how you will treat it. A stark meaning may unfold to some distant and unfeeling historian. A warm memory may be revived in some fond heart.

A moment may be spent in contemplation. A reflection may be cast on what we are.¹⁸

¹⁸ Moore, Jr. *Chili Chapters*, 62.



Figure 6, (Left to Right) Gravestones of Israel Chapman, Sr., Charity Chapman, and Israel Chapman, Jr.