

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #23

(Historical items from the "Madison Bouckville Antique Week" region)

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The Madison-Bouckville area has been rich in history from the arrival of the first settlers to the present day. As an addition to the website, we have decided to share some of that history in order that the patrons who travel to the Madison-Bouckville Show will have a better understanding of our truly unique region.

A Mysterious Cemetery Stone

There is a monument in the Madison Village Cemetery which has always had a mysterious aura about it. The stone reads:

Ruth Montague Lucas Bronson
Wife of Rev. Miles Bronson
Died 30 September, 1869 at 56 Years
For 33 Years Missionary to Assam, India

The location of the gravestone is approximately 100 feet from the cemetery entrance once you have entered the north driveway next to the Madison Historical Society building. The stone is on the right side of the blacktop driveway.

Who were Ruth and Miles Bronson and what is the connection between Madison and India?

Ruth Lucas (born August 13, 1813) was the daughter of John and Orlinda Bigelow Lucas.

John Lucas had established a store at Indian Opening, one of two early settlements in the Town of Madison, the other being at Madison Center. The store was established in the mid-1790's, soon after the initial settlement of the town. Indian Opening was a short distance to the north of present day Madison and presented all indications of becoming a prosperous community.

Mr. Lucas was a respected businessman and c.1807 moved his store to the northeast corner of the main intersection in the new community of Madison Four Corners. His move was due to the construction of the new Cherry Valley Turnpike. Business would be better along the new highway which was used by settlers traveling west.

Ruth Montague Lucas was raised at Madison Four Corners. She was a respected young lady and attended church regularly. This is where she met Miles Bronson, who was a seminary student at nearby Madison University in Hamilton, New York. This was c.1834. As a requirement of the seminary, Miles preached at local churches in the Hamilton area.

THE REV. MILES BRONSON

Miles Bronson was born in Norway, Herkimer County, New York on July 20, 1812. He attended the Theological Seminary at Madison University, Hamilton, New York and graduated in the Class of 1836. This was the same class that produced the Rev. Philetus Peck, whose portrait hangs above the fireplace in the first dining room at the Landmark Restaurant in Bouckville, New York.

Bronson found his true religious calling while at the seminary. As we have stated, each future minister was required to preach the word of God at area churches. It was while preaching at nearby Madison, New York that Miles Bronson met his future wife, Ruth Lucas.

The couple soon fell in love. When Miles asked Ruth's father for her hand in marriage, John Lucas replied that he was unwilling to give his daughter to such a life of hardship. His exact words are quoted as being – "I would rather bury my Ruth than permit her to go with you as a foreign missionary."

Ruth almost immediately became seriously ill, and Mr. Lucas asked the Lord to forgive him, and he promised the Lord that if Ruth recovered from the illness, he would give his permission for the marriage to go ahead. Ruth did recover and the wedding took place on April 29, 1836.

Rev. Bronson was appointed to begin his missionary work in the Naga Hills of Assam, India. The Bronson's eldest daughter, Mary, was born in Sadiya, Assam, India in 1838. Miles Bronson prepared primers and tracts while Ruth opened a school. The family settled into a life of preaching the word of God.

In 1841 the family left the Naga Hills for Nowgong. During their time as missionaries in India the Bronsons would have six daughters – Mary, Maria, Eliza, Harriette, Sophia and Frances. In 1846 the Bronsons decided to return to America to raise their children in a more healthful climate and to educate them in a Christian land. Frances was left behind because of illness and died by the time she was two.

The other children were placed with families in the United States to be raised. An oddity is that Sophia was placed with Weston Bronson, the eldest brother of Miles, in Hamilton, New York. A seventh daughter, Martha, was born at this time but did not survive.

The years of missionary work for the Bronsons were not always kind. They were living in a foreign land. The local inhabitants did not speak the English language. During their years in India there was warfare between the natives of India and their British colonial masters. Disease, which included jungle fever and cholera, was rampant due to the excessive heat, humidity, and stagnant water.

In the course of their missionary years, the Bronsons returned to the U.S. a number of times to recover their health and plan for future missionary work. In 1868 Ruth Bronson became ill while in India and they returned to the U.S. to seek treatment. She never fully recovered and was taken to her home in Madison. She died there on September 30, 1869. The gravestone, placed in the Madison Village Cemetery, is a fitting tribute and briefly records the life of this extraordinary woman.

The Rev. Bronson soon returned to India with his only unmarried daughter, Maria, to resume his missionary work. He married a second time, the widow of Rev. Danforth. Her health soon failed and she also died. Thirty-eight days later his daughter Maria died of Asiatic cholera. Bronson eventually married for a third time, Mary Rankin, a woman who was much younger than he. A son was born to the couple who was named Miles Bronson and later twin daughters, Ruth and Laura, were also born to the Bronsons.

Approximately five years later Miles Bronson fell from an elephant. Hoping to regain his health, the couple returned to the United States. They moved into the home of his youngest daughter, Sophia, in Eaton Rapids, Michigan. Bronson helped with services at the local church but his health never fully returned. He died on November 9, 1883 at 71 years of age. He was buried at Rosehill Cemetery, Eaton Rapids, Eaton County, Michigan.

We had always wondered why the grave of Ruth Montague Lucas Bronson was in the Madison Cemetery but the grave of Rev. Miles Bronson was not there also. As with much of our history, there was certainly more to the story.