

Cleveland's Ned Sherman

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Cleveland's Ned Sherman Submitted by Heather Stevens

Inside and outside of the Town of Constantia, the two bits of historic lore that people seem most likely to know are (1) the story of the nobleman living on Frenchman's Island and (2) the knowledge of that Cleveland elected what was possibly the first black mayor in the state. Legends have grown up around the Frenchman and the black mayor. These beliefs, like most oral history, have some basis in fact.

Ned Sherman, President of the Village of Cleveland

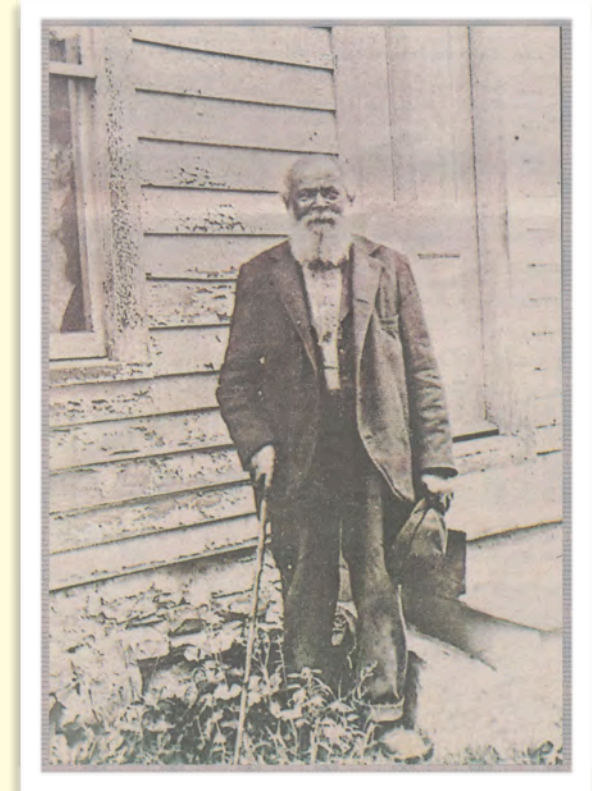
Many have written a bout Edward "Ned" Sherman, including Dick Case, Jack Henke, Scott Scanlon, and Charlotte Weed. Most agree that he was born in Saratoga in 1807, was a driver on an Erie Canal packet boat, and lived in Herkimer before coming to Cleveland in about 1851. There is some confusion over whether he was appointed or elected in 1878, and whether his office as mayor or president of the Village of Cleveland. Ned Sherman died at the age of one hundred.

High tech resources have brought new understanding to the story of Ned Sherman. These include newspaper articles written at the time he was elected president of the village board, now available thanks to internet sites specializing in preserving printed history. It's clear that this event in 19th century Cleveland was more complicated than previously known and that a sense of humor is timeless.

Sherman's History

The names of Edward Sherman's parents are unknown. The year he was born is uncertain: he seems to get older faster than the census dates would indicate. He was apparently born in New York State, but at different times reported being born in Saratoga or Greene County. He could read a little, but could not write.

Like many young men, he found work on the Erie Canal driving a packet boat - a boat that ran a regular route that carried passengers, mail, and cargo. During the winter, he was a barber and seems to have made his home in Herkimer County. In 1850 he was definitely in Herkimer, boarding with the family of a merchant, Charles Kathern. In about 1851, Sherman settled in the town of Constantia



and married Elizabeth, a black woman how had been born in Oswego County. Because the barge canal system went through Oneida Lake, it is possible Sherman had found that Constantia had a number of black families, and he may have already been courting Elizabeth before he came to Cleveland and established himself as a barber and, in time, a landowner.

Ned and Elizabeth has four daughters - Clara, Fanny, Lulu Bell, and Harriet - and a son named after Charles Katherine. After Elizabeth died, Ned married Harriet Wilson, a daughter from another local black family.

Sherman died in 1907. By that time he was claiming to be one hundred years old, but he was a man who enjoyed spinning a yarn, as well be shown in next month's display on the Cleveland Diamond Mines.

The 1878 Village President Election

The Village of Cleveland's Board of Directors had been elected, with Albert Yale as president. One act of the Board was to select a sexton to maintain the village cemetery. The man they voted to hire was Roman Catholic. At the time there was considerable distrust of Catholics and of immigrants in general, and some villagers loudly objected. In the uproar, President Yale resigned.

It was necessary to elect a replacement, and two white men were nominated. As a joke - or derision aimed at the incumbent Board - a movement to vote for the illiterate "colored" barber resulted in the majority of votes going to Ned Sherman.

Area newspapers took advantage of the situation by writing humorous or satirical pieces about Cleveland and Sherman himself.

Although his election was described as a burlesque (that is, a mockery or travesty), Sherman behaved with dignity and a sense of humor, and he is said to have served honorably and well. He was village president until the 1880 election, whereupon he declined to hold any town office, and was recognized for his tireless efforts to elect Albert Yale President once more.

Sherman's "Inaugural Address"

Friends, Romans, Countrymen: lend me your ears! I come not here to bury Cleveland, but to talk of it! To be or not to be President is the question that, like a midnight phantom, haunts my dreams. Some say I am the creature of a foul conspiracy, or an innocent victim of a stupendous joke; a lamb to slaughter let! 'Tis true the lamp of learning cannot guide my feet, yet I have wisdom and experience... Who says we won't succeed? I have done. Proceed to business. *Mexico Independent*, June 1878.

Charles Katherine

Cleveland's Kathern Street was named for Charles Kathern, a prominent Cleveland citizen and Ned Sherman's friend. In 1850 Sherman boarded with the Kathern family in Herkimer. By 1855 Sherman was married and living in Cleveland, and the Katherns were still in Herkimer. Kathern's wife died in 1858, and by 1860 Kathern had moved to Cleveland, where he eventually remarried.

Katherine was manager and investor in the Union Glass Company. He had other businesses as well, including canal boat shipper and real estate agent. He sold land to his friend Ned who, in turn, named a son Charles Katherine Sherman.

Ned Sherman Quote

"I am a Republican by color, a Democrat by affinity, a Greenbacker by conviction, and was elected on a *Know-nothing* ticket. I have been communing with the spirits, hoping to find a way to extricate myself from this purgatory of politics." *Lakeside Press*, May, 1878.

Note: From about 1850 through 1870, the Know-Nothings were a political party that took a vigorous stand against immigration and immigrants. In 1855 Abraham Lincoln wrote that if the Know-Nothings ever took power, the Declaration of Independence would have to be amended to say that all men are created equal "except negroes, and foreigners, and Catholics."

6	11/11	76	C. Kather	57	M		
			Almira Kather	57	F		Wife
			L. Kather	27	F		Child
			F. Kather	23	F		do
			L. Brown	4	F		Grand child
			C. D. Brown	6	M		do
			Barbara Trind	21	F		Servant
			C. A. Sherman	12	F	1	do

Image taken from the 1855 New York State Census.

28	Edward Sherman		M	B	
	Elizabeth L. Sherman	28	F	B	wife
	Clara Sherman	8	F	B	child
	Minnie L. Sherman	2 10/12	F	B	do
	Infant	3 weeks	F	B	do
29	Dennis Fitzpatrick	45	M		

Image taken from the 1865 New York State Census.

A MODEL VILLAGE
The Beauties and Consistency of Cleveland Christianity.
“Anything to Beat the Catholics!”
The Delightful Spectacle Presented Last Monday.
Ned Sherman Elected President of the Village!
Too Good a Representation of the Constituency which Elected Him!
Indignation Among the Honorable Business Portion of the Community

There has been a stirring time in Cleveland since Monday last. On that day a special election was held to fill the office of President of the village, made vacant by the resignation of A.A. Yale, and our distinguished colored citizen, Ned Sherman, was elected to fill the position. This move was made by a few religious fanatics and a rabble of followers, chiefly to insult the Board of Trustees and the Catholic people of the place. The Village Board had made an appointment of a poor but honest workingman to do what work was needed in the village Cemetery. This man appointed happened to be an attendant of the Catholic Church and because of this a perfected storm of howls and shrieks and denunciations forthwith filled the air, and were hurled at the Board. *Reason*, these men had none for their contemptible conduct; it was only pure cussedness. Their *excuse*, however is that it is a Catholic Board, and that they are throwing the affairs of the village into the hands of Catholics. What supreme nonsense and bigotry from men supposed to possess intelligence! Even if the Board were Catholics — (which is directly the opposite, for there is not one of them who are considered so in the strict sense of the term, and who would not, if there were, allow themselves to be biased) — are the Catholic portion of the community not equal to others? Have they no rights that anybody are bound to respect? If this place is to be managed for the exclusive benefit of a class — if the others are to have no voice or say whatever — why, they would like to know it, so that the privileged set should be forced to shoulder all the necessary expenses, taxes, &c. ...Of course, the leading and honorable businesses and professional men of the place are justly indignant at these proceedings, and condemn the principals who brought the slur on the village. *Cleveland Lakeside Press*, May, 1878.

Questions for further research and discussion:

1. Why is there uncertainty today about Ned Sherman's age?
2. What can you find out about the Know-Nothing group?
3. Why were Catholics and immigrants viewed as unwelcome during Ned's time?
4. What were the immigration laws in the 1800's? How are they different or similar to today's immigration laws?
5. Where did most of the immigrants come from during the mid 1800's? Why were they coming to the United States?