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Age 59

My experiences working for the New England people

I went to Hampton, Virginia when I was only twelve years old. The reason I was sent away to school when I was so young was because my mother was dead, and I had no one to take care of me. My older sister and three brothers were also at the same school. At that time Hampton Institute was like an elementary school so any one that was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade was admitted to the school. Later they raised the age limit to 17 years of age, and above the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade. At the present time it is more like a college. Hampton Institute is a school for the Negroes, but at one time the American Indians, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans, and Indians from Jamaica were also admitted there. At the time I was at Hampton there were many Oneidas there, and also Indians of other western tribes. We Indian girls had our own quarters, and the Indian boys had their quarters. The Negroes had their quarters, but we all ate in the same dining room, only there were separate tables for Indian students. We all attended the classrooms together. The classes consisted of Indians, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Negroes. The wealthy New England people used to pay the Indian's scholarship at Hampton, but the government paid the Indian students

board, clothing, and transportation while the colored students paid their own expenses while in school, excepting that their scholarships were paid by the rich New England people. I doubt it there are any Indians attending Hampton Institute today. There were still a few in 1918, but not any Oneidas. I did not mind going to school with the colored people at the time, but now I am always ashamed to tell that I had colored people are my classmates. It seems to me, at that time I did not realize how I would seem to other people. After I was there a year I was told that I had to go to the New England state to do a light work for the summer, because Hampton would be too warm during the summer months. So early part of June all the Indians were getting ready to "go up North" as they called the New England States. Every Indian girl was in hurry scurry, including my self, although I really did not fully realize what it was all about. The girls stored some of their clothing and books in the store room up stairs, and packed the rest of their belongings in a suitcase or two, or sometimes in a trunk to take along. We went in a boat from Old Paint Comfort to New York City then from there we all went to different places in the New England States. Everything was new to me and I was really enjoying the sights etc. New York city really thrilled me. I just wished we would stay there a few days and go sight-

seeing every day. It seemed good to eat in a swell restaurant. I think we ate in a Y.W.P.A. The immense high buildings surely impressed me, but I did not have time to stop and look at them. The lady who had charge of us was trying hard to keep us together, so no one would get left behind as we got in the elevated cars. Every time I stopped to gaze at anything some one would poke me in the back and tell me to keep moving. We finally all got to the Depot where two of us girls were met by a lady that took us to the Adirondack Mountains, to her summer home. She seemed like a good natured lady, and was very nice to us. The other girl was Lavinia Adams, now Mrs. Lavinia Skenandore. She was older than I and she did the cooking and I was her helper, or second girl. We went on the train for 3 or 4 hours. It seemed like ages to me, as I was beginning to be anxious to see the place where we were going to work for the summer. I was wondering if the other girls had reached their destination. At last, the lady told us to get ready to get off, as the next station was where we were going to get off. Some one met us, and we rode in a fancy buggy, pulled by lively horses. When we arrived at the lady's place, I noticed that there was another lady there, so there were two ladies occupying the summer home. We were shown to our room, which was right over the kitchen. The next morning, I took a good look at the place. The house was situated

beside a huge rock, and one side of the place was a wooded rocky hillside. They had a gold course there, and the grounds was kept in good condition. It was a beautiful place. When the lady came down, she assigned us our duties, so we both started to work. It was the first time I realized that I was sent there to work. I used to have to take warm water up stairs for the ladies to wash with in the morning, and then I had to wait on the table. Lavinia did the cooking, but one of the ladies director her. I just carried the food in the dining room, and placed them on the table. I also helped with the dish washing, and prepared vegetables. I really was kept pretty busy, but we always had an hour or two in the afternoon. Our room used to be so hot that we could not go up there to rest in the afternoon, finally I told the lady, and she fixed up another room for us. She had another window put in, and oh! what a difference it made. We were comfortable the rest of the season. Once in a while these ladies took us out riding to another country home. We stayed in the buggy while they visited their friends. I noticed that most of the owners of these country homes had residences in New York City or Brooklyn, and only lived in the mountains during the summer. They hired some one to take care of their homes, or estates in the winter time. we stayed at this place during June, July, and August and I got about \$1.00 per month, but

Lavinia got more. I was not used to working, and I felt as though I was working hard for such little wages, but I really was not doing any heavy work. There were no conveniences there in those mountains. When we washed, we had to rub by hand, and iron the old way.

These people had lots of company, or else they were operating a summer resort. Any way, there were people coming back and forth from the city. One of the ladies had a wealthy son who came there with his friend, another young man. They made so much work for us. They got up later than the other people there, and we always had to serve breakfast for them later than the other people. They played golf every day. When they were getting ready to leave, Lavinia and I were both rejoicing, and when we thought they were about ready we went out, and climbed behind a big rock back of the house and we could see them down below us. The last minute they ran in the kitchen and called us, but neither one of us answered, so they left without seeing us. The lady told us afterwards that the young fellows were going to give us a "tip" or give us money as a gift. We said, "We don't accept presents, but we wish they would pay us for the work we did for them." Since then I found out that a "tip" really means. We stayed there all summer, and worked hard for those wealthy ladies. By the time we left there, we

knew why they were rich. They were very saving in fact, they were stingy. They worked us hard for the wages they gave us, but of course they were not mean to us. We told the lady that places the girls in the New England homes that we did not want to go back there again, so I was sent to another place the following summer. This time I was sent to Newport, Rhode Island. I worked for a young couple. They were well to do people. They had a nice home, but they were not society people. They treated me as though I was one of the family. Of course, I was a little more experienced to do maid work, so the lady liked my work. She made it as easy for me as she possibly could, and let me have all the afternoon to rest or go see the other girls working in Newport. There were several of the Indian girls there, but they were not all Oneida girls, but they were all from Hampton. We used to go to the Beach, and see the ocean waves come to the beach. We enjoyed watching the people in their bathing suits, but we used to just sit on the beach and take in the sea breeze. We went around the cliffs several times. On the cliffs are the mansions of the "400" society-people, the Vanderbilts and others. As Newport is a summer resort every thing was very high in the summer time, we could not afford to buy any clothing. We used to attend the Band Concerts, held every other evening at the different parks. New port

had more beautiful parks than any city I know of. When I left Newport to go back to school I really hated to leave the people I worked for, or stayed with as they were so good to me. Mrs. Barlow told me they had a child that died and she was born the same year I was, so I seemed to remind them of their little daughter. After I was back to Hampton I used to hear from Mrs. Barlow and after I finally came home to Oneida. I still corresponded with Mrs. Barlow. Now and then she would send me a present. She used to send me all her discarded clothes. She was a large woman and so I had to always fix or alter them. Sometimes I gave some of the clothing to my relatives. One day I was fixing a suit when I came across a little bag sewed on to the lining of the sleeve. I ripped the little bag and inside I found a little bundle and after I unwrapped it I found a sparkling stone, and it was a diamond. I did not know what to do about it. It seemed to me that it was a funny place to hide a diamond, but I took for granted she wanted me to have the diamond so in order not to lose it, I had a ring made and had the diamond mounted, but I was always ashamed to wear the ring, for fear people would criticize me on account of my circumstances. I knew myself that there are lot of other things I would buy before I would think of buying any kind of a rind. About that time I received a litter, asking me to visit the Barlows for a month

or longer, so I made preparation to go. I went on the train all the day. I got there in the evening, but no one met me at the Depot, so I looked around for a taxi, and they were all driving away, but there was a big limousine and I hailed the driver, and he opened the door and I told him the address I wanted to go, so he drove there, and I got out and went to the door. The house was all lit up and the folks were home. They were glad to see me, and were evidently expecting me. We got to visiting, and after a while some one said that my driver was out there waiting, then it occurred to me that I had forgotten to pay him, and it happen to be the boss of the taxi company.

While I was there she told me about losing a diamond. She had no idea how she lost it or where she lost it. She said she was going to give a diamond ring to her niece, and then she changes her mind, and she had the diamond taken out, and a ruby put in its place, and she thought she put the diamond away, but she could never find it. Then I told her that I found the diamond in the sleeve of a suit she had sent me, and that I had it put in a ting and took it out of my purse and gave it to her. She was very pleased, and asked me what I paid for the ring, and I told her \$19.00 so she handed me \$20.00.

I thought afterwards how foolish I was to return it, because she did not give me a reward. I stayed



about a month. I helped her and worked as hard as when I used to work there. I finally started home, and came back the same way on the train. We used to go on a boat from New York city to Newport on the Fall River Line when I was sent from Hampton, Virginia, and I knew how rough it used to be. We always got sea sick going in a boat. When I got the New York city I went to some of the big department stores and did some shopping, then I came on. I enjoyed the trip very much, and I often wished I could have another trip like that. After I came home I felt like working, and I appreciated my home. A home sometimes gets monotonous especially a home without a child, and I have not been fortunate enough to have children. Of course I have tried to occupy my time with something, so sometimes I plant potatoes or beans or corn and spent my time taking care of the garden. I also raise chickens and I make a little side money that was. I also go away to work at a summer resort some summers. One summer I went to Burlington, Wisconsin. There was a lake about one and a half mile from town. I worked in the kitchen and had charge of the electric dish washer and the girls that did the work. I enjoyed my work because it was not hard and we had plenty of time to rest between work hours the busiest time was from Friday evening to Sunday evening, as most of the people came only for weekend and sometimes there would

be about 500 people there during Saturday and Sunday. During the week we would have about 250 to 300 people and we were not rushed at all. We had lots of time to go in swimming in the lake, and in the evening we went to eh dance hall and watch the people enjoy themselves. Sometimes they gave pretty good programme of home talent. I made about \$50.00 clear money and had a good vacation besides I was there during July and August an dafter Labor Day my husband came there with another couple and we went on to the Chicago Fair and stayed three days, then we returned home. That was another treat that I enjoyed. My husband is now laid up and not expected to live very much longer, so I do not expect any more pleasure trips anywhere.

About the places I had in the New England states, I will say that one place I had in the Adirondack Mountains I outgrew my clothes, as I was still growing and I did not earn enough to buy new clothes so the lady let me have her old dress to wear back to school. She paid me \$.25 per week, and when I left she gave me a sealed envelope and told me not to open it until I to back to Hampton. Do you suppose I could wait that long? No, I opened that envelope as soon as I got out of sight and I found that there was five dollars in the envelope. She had actually given me two dollars more than what she told me I was going to get. They surely did not pay s very much for our work those

days. My brother was the first Oneida that attended school at Hampton and he told me that when he was sent up north to work, the farmer he worked for wasn't going to pay him any thing because he was going to teach him everything, but my brother learned at home, how to rake up hay, how to use the scythe, and how to cut grain with a cradle on a scythe, and most everything about farm work. My brother told the New England farmers that he would not work unless he was paid, and that was the beginning of the students getting paid for their work in the summer months. But even then they paid as little as they could. And they made the Indians work hard for their money. I stayed with the Barlows one winter and went to school with the white children. I learned more that year than all the years I was at Hampton. There were some good rich New England people, and these people were surely good to me. They dressed me like any white child and I only worked after school and Saturdays. But I did not feel at home with white children, and although I made friends among them, yet I felt rather sensitive. When we studied history and whenever there was something about the Indians in the out lesson they all looked at me and that used to make me furious. The children did not dare say any thing to me, but I could just guess what they had in mind. Although the people coaxes me to stay, I decided to go back to Hampton and finish my

education there. I was graduated in 1902 and returned home. My old grandmother, who had taken care of me after my mother died, was failing so I decided to stay with her, and take care of her, and she died about two years later then I was married soon after that. I never used my education in a way I had planned to use it. I thought I would apply for work in the Civil Service, but of course I have used it in my work at home, the way I conduct my self wherever I am. My husband was also at Hampton, so we often talk about one experience of while going to school. Most of the teachers at Hampton were rich New England people who donated their time to the school. Later when the school increased in attendance the school had to hire teachers, and of course they got paid, but they hired college graduates, so they had very efficient teachers. Hampton teaches college studies, even when I was there, but now it had turned to a regular college. The Indian schools such as Carlisle, Haskell, and other large school used to have very poor white teacher, many of them were not qualified to teach, but if they have a pull with the superintendent they could hold the job. It has been only recently that the standard of the teachers has been raised. They now have to take civil service examination and under forty year of age. Years ago we used to have old ladies for our teachers, and id not follow any method and were

not really interested in their work, but were there for one reason and that was to make money. Some days they just let the class pass time away by drawing, while the teacher wrote letter or did some fancy work. When an inspector came around then they made a good showing. Most of the government employees were there because they were friends or relative of the Superintendent. They used to abuse the Indian children too. Sometime they punished them severely when it was uncalled for. They would give little girls heavy work to do. That was finally reported and the Indian Office put a stop to it. The Indian Schools were more like the Industrial Schools for white children. Everything was strictly on a routine and not a bit homelike, It was com. Collier the present commissioner of Indian Affairs, with the help of Mrs. Roosevelt that put the Indian Government schools on a different base. Now everything is more like a home and instead of having a mean matron they have a young woman, who is sort of a companion for the young girls and she is called "Girls Guide". The boys and girls are allowed to mingle together on the school campus. The large Institution are more like the white College or Universities but I still don't think it is right. They should hire mostly Indian Employees because only an Indian can fully understand an Indian's ways. There are plenty of educated Indians that could qualify for these

positions but many times the white people get the preference. Look at the colored people. They have their own teaches and how well they are getting along in educational line. I think that the government is not doing right by trying to make farmers of all the Indians. They are not all interested in farming, and this giving land back to the Indians is not for the Indians benefit. It only means that they have to work hard, and make money for the government, if they stop grinding away then the government will step in and take it away from that individual and give it to the next foolish Indian. My husband tried to farm, and we just could not make money on the farm. We finally sold the farm and we opened a grocery store, but we did not have enough money to keep up and it was during depression, so we finally sold the store and bought a small tract of land and built a small log house and a little addition to it, and then my husband worked on the W.P.A. He worked there until he took sick, but he has just reached the pension age, so he began to get pension. That is how we live today, but after he is gone I don't know just what will happen to me. I really don't know what would have happened to the Oneidas if they were not given relief at the time. There was no more wood to cut and sell, and no work of any kind in sight. There were lot of young people that had found employment in some large city came back to

the reservation thinking that they could find something to do here. They were given relief too. Now that the factories are hiring help again many of them have gone back to the cities, and some are getting ready to go back, and try city life again. I think eventually the young Oneida people will all got away from here, excepting the ones that like to farm. It seems to me that the older generation of Oneidas were better farmers then this generation or else the land was new and fertile so the crops yielded more, but most of the old fellows lead pretty good farms and were getting along dine, but as soon as their sons or heirs got hold of the land it began to get run down and white people got a hold of the farms and they seem to make improvements. I often wonder how these New England farmers are getting along, no doubt the old fashion farmers are all dead, and their old farms are under new management with all the modern farm machinery, but at the time I was in the New England States, I though those farmers were a little behind times. Some farms looked as though they might have been flourishing farms at one time, but at the time I saw them they were in a dilapidated condition. I really wondered how they made their living as some of the land is rocky but some of the farmers had boarders in the summer time. The business people of New York City and Boston and Brooklyn and other large cities

all spent their vacation in the country. Some of them would go just for the week end. I enjoyed that climate, especially in the mountains. I often wished I had enough money to go back there, and stay all summer.