

Thirty-six Dollars and a Wife

By Janet S. Porter

The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook, p. 12

CHARACTERS (5 or 6 – 4 males, 1 female, Narrator)

Phineas W. Cook (PWC)

Phineas Cook Sr. (his father)

Salmon Hall, brother-in-law (optional. This part could be taken by Phineas Sr.)

Henry Howland

Ann Eliza Howland

- Narrator: Phineas Cook sold his farm in Goshen, Connecticut in 1836 and moved to Richland, Kalamazoo, Michigan to begin the process of clearing the land for a new farm. His son-in-law Salmon Hall and his son Phineas Junior, who came the next year, did their best to help him.
- PWC: Pa, our Ma will soon be on her way from Connecticut. She'll be here in the spring, and I have to earn some money to pay her back the \$36 she loaned me to get to Michigan.
- Salmon: I don't envy you, Phin. She's a businesswoman from top to toe. I'd almost rather owe money to old Uncle Moses than to your mother.
- Phineas Sr. Our Uncle Moses was pretty smart. He knew we were in trouble and waited until we had no other choice. Now he owns our beautiful farm in Connecticut--bought it all—the house, the barn, the fields and the maple trees at the bottom of the hill. I sure miss that place!
- PWC: I do too, Pa. All we have here is a patch of prairie and a lot of trees to cut. And on top of that, I owe Ma money.
- Phineas Sr. If she gets here and you don't have the \$36, you'll be in big trouble, and I won't be able to save you.
- Salmon: I'm going to Barry County to get a farm for myself. It's up to you to help your Pa, Phin.
- PWC: I've agreed to hire out to Henry Howland who lives over in Ross for \$15 per month. He has some fencing and building and needs someone to help him get his farm ready for spring. It's only about ten miles away, but I'm staying there for the winter.
- Phineas Sr. I'm glad you have a job, son. You need the money or your mother will box your ears—even if you are 18 years old. But don't forget I'll need help in the spring too. Come back as soon as the snow melts.
- PWC: I'll be back, Pa.

(They leave the stage. Phin, Henry, and Ann Eliza Howland come to the stage)

Henry: You've worked for me three months, Phin. You're a good worker, and I'll be happy to hire you any time you need a job.

PWC: I would stay to work longer, but my Pa needs help over in Richland, so I'm going to help him.

Ann Eliza: *(Loudly whispers)* Don't forget me.

PWC: That brings up a subject I need to talk about, Mr. Howland.

Henry: And what's that?

PWC: It's your daughter, Ann Eliza. She and I have become good friends since I came here. I want to marry her.

Henry: You mean you want to marry a fifteen-year old girl! You most certainly cannot have my permission. She's still a child.

Ann Eliza: I am not a child, Pa. Phin and I want to marry.

Henry: Well don't expect me to go along with that idea. I think you're both too young. Phin here is too young to make a living anyway.

PWC: I'll show you, Mr. Howland. Someday you'll change your mind. I'm perfectly capable of making a living.

(PWC picks up a hatchet and begins whacking at a stick. He misses the stick and cuts into his knee. Ann Eliza screams and Henry runs to him.)

Henry: Young man, you almost cut off your leg. I think I'd better take you home. You can have my daughter when you grow up a little.

(Henry and Ann Eliza leave the stage. Phin sits and puts his bandaged leg on a chair. Phineas Sr. comes in.)

Phineas Sr. Well, son, I see you have returned from Ross, but you're not much good to me in this condition. You can't even walk.

PWC: Pa, I'm sorry. I promise I'll do everything I can to help you this spring.

Phineas Sr. And what would that be?

PWC: I'll do all the cooking. I'll clean the house and wash your clothes. I'll have everything ready when Ma comes from Connecticut.

Phineas Sr. I guess that's the best you can do.

PWC: There's one more thing, Pa.

Phineas Sr. And what is that?

PWC: I want to marry Henry Howland's daughter.

Phineas Sr. Well, I see you were up to more than just making \$15 a month, young man. And you must have made quite an impression. Under the circumstances, I'd be surprised if he agreed to let you marry her.

PWC: He didn't, but he will.

Phineas Sr. We'll see about that. In the meantime, there's a pile of dishes over there. You need to make our bread, but you have to take the wheat all the way to the mill at Ross to have it ground.

PWC: Ross? I'll go to Ross.

Phineas Sr. Don't get too excited; you'll be busy. There's mice living under my bed and in the outhouse. They'd better be gone when your Ma gets here or she'll have a fit. You'd better get to work. I'm going outside to make a farm, and I hope I don't die before you get better.

PWC: Pa, I'll see to it you won't die. It's my job to help you the best I can.

Family Discussion

Phineas Wolcott Cook was an adult by this time. He could have been looking out for himself and his own interests. His brothers had certainly followed their own interests by this time.

Why was he so committed to help his parents get established in Michigan?

Family loyalty was very important at this time. It was accepted that the youngest daughter would take care of her parents in their old age and the youngest son would help his father on the farm as long as he needed help. Young Phineas put the needs of his parents ahead of his own needs—even knowing it would take him much longer to get his own farm than it had taken his brothers. Yet he always helped his parents willingly. There was no selfishness in him.

How could this attitude help families in our time?

What is our responsibility to parents? To siblings? To children?

Elder Robert D. Hales said:

"Being one in a family carries a great responsibility of caring, loving, lifting, and strengthening each member of the family so that all can righteously endure to the end in mortality and dwell together throughout eternity. It is not enough just to save ourselves. It is equally important that parents, brothers, and sisters are saved in our families. If we return home alone to our Heavenly Father, we will be asked, "Where is the rest of the family?" This is why we teach that families are forever. The eternal nature of an individual becomes the eternal nature of the family."¹

¹ "The Eternal Family," Elder Robert D. Hales, October, 1996



