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Mr. Stetson bought a seat on the New York Stock Exchange in 1930 and with Daniel S. Blackman formed the brokerage firm of Stetson and Blackman. Three years later the Governing Committee of the Exchange expelled him for a misstatement in answering a questionnaire and for refusing to give the Committee information which it requested. A Federal receiver was appointed for the firm, but Mr. Stetson personally bought up all of the claims against it. The sale of his collection of rare books at the American Art Association—Anderson Galleries was one of the highlights of the season of 1935, and brought over \$97,000.

In 1942, after the death of his second son, Captain Stuart C. Stetson, in a flying accident on a training field, he enlisted in the Marine Corps, serving as a major in the recruiting service. Soon thereafter he lost also his other son, Major John B. Stetson, III. In 1943 he was transferred to the army with rank of colonel and sent to Iran as fiscal advisor to the commanding general. Later he became director of the fiscal department of the Persian Gulf Command, handling the lend-lease and later the liquidation of the American property, including railroads, of the region.

Colonel Stetson died at his home in Elkins Park on November 15, 1952, survived by his widow, the former Ruby F. Carlisle, of Wakefield, Massachusetts, and by two daughters, Mrs. N. W. Widowson and Mrs. J. J. Cruise. His library was sold by Parke-Bernet in February and April, 1953.

C. K. S.

### ALBERT BACHELLER WELLS

Albert B. Wells, formerly head of the American Optical Company, and founder of Old Sturbridge Village, died at La Jolla, California, March 10, 1953, at the age of eighty.

He was born in Southbridge, November 19, 1872, the son of George Washington and Mary Eliza (McGregory) Wells. Following the completion of his early education he entered Rutgers College in 1888 and two years later transferred to Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard University. After one year he left to take up his life-long connection with the American Optical Company, which had been organized in 1869, on the foundation of earlier companies which went back to 1833. Albert's father, George W. Wells, was the leading factor in the growth of the company, serving successively as secretary, treasurer and president. When Mr. Wells became president in 1891, he was joined by his sons—Channing who succeeded to the presidency in 1912 upon his father's death, Albert who later became treasurer and chairman of the board, and Cheney who later became executive vice-president. Under this family leadership the American Optical Company experienced a remarkable growth, expanding to a position of one of the largest optical companies in the world, with its products well known in every country on the globe. The family retained complete control of the company until they decided to retire to private life and sold the American Optical Company to New York interests in 1951.

Albert Wells maintained an active and responsible interest in the company throughout all of this period of expansion. He also attained a high place in the community, both in banking and industrial positions. He was married in 1900 to Ethel Burnham of Chicago, daughter of Daniel H. Burnham, the well-known architect. It was Mr. Burnham who designed the house which Mr. Wells occupied in Southbridge. Mrs. Wells died at Rancho Santa Fé, in California, in 1949. They had one son, George B. Wells, who served for several years as president of the company.

Mr. Wells will always be known and remembered for his activities in establishing Old Sturbridge Village. It all

started, rather casually, on a golfing trip to Vermont, where on a rainy day some of his companions exercised their fondness for antiques by exploring the country around to see what they could find. Mr. Wells immediately became interested and soon began to take up the quest for antiques seriously. In ten years he gathered one of the most remarkable and comprehensive collections ever formed by one man. His primary interest was to acquire the domestic furnishings and implements of a country house of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Everything was grist to his mill—farm implements, household furnishings of every kind, children's toys, examples of all the early New England trades and shops, and practically every item that would have been advertised as for sale in late eighteenth century newspapers. His success in building up a monumental collection was astounding. Antique dealers wore a path to his door and always went away empty handed. He maintained an accession book which, when I saw it twenty years ago, contained 150,000 separate items. Gradually he gave up floor after floor of his house in Southbridge to the display of such relics and was forced to store much material elsewhere. Finally the collection outgrew its surroundings. In 1935 the decision was made to establish an old New England village where this vast collection could be shown in houses and shops in an appropriate setting. Aided by his brother, Cheney, who had been collecting clocks on a grandiose scale, the brothers purchased a site in Sturbridge, the David Wight farm.

Work on the Village began in 1936. The Wells brothers purchased early houses in Massachusetts and Connecticut, moved them to Sturbridge and restored them to their original appearance. He once told me that it cost more to move an old house from its original site and re-erect it than it did to build a completely new replica. But the plan

progressed rapidly and effectively. Today Old Sturbridge Village contains over thirty shops, mills, houses, a tavern, a printing office, a blacksmith's shop, a church and a general store, arranged in a tract of five hundred acres. In most of the shops artisans and craftsmen are working, to show how the products of a century or more ago were made. Opened to the public in 1946, the Village has made amazing progress. A non-profit organization, it at last has been able to make itself self-supporting. In 1952, under the able directorship of Earle W. Newton, the Village had 92,000 visitors and received a yearly income from admissions alone, of \$140,000. And all this came from an idea initiated by Albert and Cheney Wells scarcely twenty-five years ago.

Mr. Wells was elected a member of the American Antiquarian Society in 1943, and always maintained an active interest in the library, although his residence in California and his recent illness prevented his attendance at the meetings. In his will he left the bulk of his estate to a fund, the income from which should be distributed to organizations operated for religious, charitable, scientific, literary or educational purposes. His was a worthy and honorable life.

C. S. B.

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