



Uncle Al Drake Entertains



At the Westfield Club Smoker, 1895.
Left to right: A. L. Russell, Uncle Al Drake, Harry Evans; below, Jim Burdette, humorist; Editor Uncle Alfred Pearsall.

“Too bad, boys! Too damn bad! Can’t play in the summer house on a rainy night like this. Come right in! Come right in! Glad to see you! By thunder, you boys look dandy in your new suits. Well! Well! Well! Here’s Professor Cro—— what in the old scratch is your name? O, yes, Crotherton. I get it mixed up with Crowhorn. You’re a great cornet player; best I ever heard. Big thing for Westfield when we got you to lead our band. This town can’t be beat for enterprise. I want you to play the Mocking Bird piece. The oodle-oodle part is my favorite. Well! Well! And, here’s the Pearsall boys! Where’s the old man? Best Editor in the state. John Burhans and Lisha Taylor—how de-do! Regular Methodist meeting. Why didn’t you bring the Dominie along? Hello there, Ed Winter, Will Townsend! Glad to see you. I’ll be

—Ho! Ho! Ho! It’s Bob Taylor and his banjo. Hooray for a good, old-fashioned hoe down! Can’t beat Bob at tick’lin’ the strings. And here’s Bill Taylor. And Bish and George Chamberlain. If your religion is as good as your music, boys, you’ll get to Heaven—walk right in. Ha! Ha! Ha! Uncle Al will say a good word for you poker players.”

Thus, Uncle Al Drake opened his home and his heart to the Westfield Band, one stormy night in July, 1892. He always did things in the grand manner, was as generous as he was explosive—a sort of benevolent autocrat who scolded, swore and laughed, was loyal to his town, and his friends, and was easily moved to forgive and forget his enemies. “I can stand most anything,” he once told Uncle Sam Reese, “even a Democrat speech, but I’ll be — — if I can stand Chauncey B. Ripley’s singing.” He bet the Magnificent Mr. Ripley a \$25.00 silk hat that Tippecanoe Ben Harrison would sweep the country and when he heard the sad news of Republican defeat, he sent the hat to Ripley by special messenger, with a card which read, “When your old hat wears out, you and Grover can talk free trade through this one.”

Uncle Albert’s mansion, a great Victorian house in the center of what is now Stoneleigh Park, where he lived luxuriously with his wife and daughter and a retinue of servants, was the show place of the town. Here he sat in state and received his Stock Exchange friends, politicians, sportsmen, civic and charitable leaders, and occasionally a clergyman. He liked “Dominies.” When the noted evangelist, B. Fay Mills, preached here, he said to Reverend Rice, “Bring him over to the house. I’m interested in being saved. I’m like the Yankee deacon: I can’t say that I believe in hell, but I think it’s a gospel that ought to be preached.”