

## *The Southern Friend*

Addison Coffin was not alone, of course, among North Carolina Friends in being an abolitionist, a reformer, or an advocate of westward migration. But there was one aspect of his life that, to my mind, makes him almost unique. Addison Coffin may have been the last pre-modern Friend living in the nineteenth century.

I call Coffin “pre-modern” because I think that his was a mind that in many ways looked backward, that was at odds with the nineteenth century, let alone the twentieth, which Addison Coffin almost lived to see. (He died in 1897.) He lived in a world in which he saw visions and heard voices, convinced that he was the last survivor of an ancient race, the last heir to an ancestral gift of second sight. This is the most fascinating part of Addison Coffin’s life.<sup>5</sup>

Addison Coffin’s “gift” came to him through his mother, Aletha Fluke Coffin. According to Addison, she was an Albanoid, descended from the prehistoric, pre-Celtic inhabitants of Ireland. “When the first colony of Hebrews came to Ireland 1200 B.C., the Albanoids were in possession of the island, and had been for an unknown period,” Addison wrote. They were highly civilized, had a regular alphabet and written language, and knew many arts unknown to the Hebrews.” With the coming of the Hebrews, two thousand years of war followed, with the last battle coming about 800 A.D. in County Down. By 1784, there were only fifteen Albanoids left, including Addison’s grandmother, Mary Fluke. In that year they came to America (Coffin, A. 1897, 12).

In his autobiography, Addison Coffin recorded other Albanoid traditions. They were not European, Asian, or Egyptian in origin, he claimed; they had come to Ireland from the west. Coffin speculated, although he was careful not to state definitely, that their likely origin was the lost continent of Atlantis. On a trip to Ireland in 1892, Addison claimed that he found in County Down the temple that the Albanoids had built 2500 years before Christ, and that the Albanoids had been in Ireland even before that (Coffin, A. 1897, 449–50).

The problem with Coffin’s story is that there is absolutely nothing to confirm it. No one other than Addison Coffin seems ever to have heard of the Albanoids—no historian of Ireland, not even specialists in Irish folklore and mythology. The root word—alban or alba—is traditionally associated not with Ireland, but with Scotland. One of the ancient names that Scots applied to themselves was the Alban race. (Albany also derives from it.) So here we have charitably to leave Friend Addison’s

## *Addison Coffin: Quaker Visionary*



Aletha Coffin

Irish history as unproved and unprovable (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, s.v. *albanian*).

Whether or not her ancestors came from Atlantis, Aletha Fluke Coffin was a remarkable woman. She became a Friend shortly after her marriage to Vestal Coffin in 1817 and remained one until her death.

Left a widow in 1826, she raised her four children on a small farm at New Garden. When the boarding school opened there in 1837, she saw to it that Addison and his brother Emory attended. In 1831 she rode