

NUGGETS of HISTORY

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ALTA M. HULETT

19TH CENTURY LAWYER - 20TH CENTURY WOMAN
by Robert J. Lindvall

Sometimes researchers find a few individuals who have accomplished a great deal in a short period of time; these individuals make the researchers wonder how much more they would have accomplished had they lived longer. One such person who fits this group was Miss Alta M. Hulett.

Alta M. Hulett was born June 4, 1854, on a farm in Rockton Township, Illinois. Miss Hulett's father was George J. Hulett, a physician and farmer, originally from New York. Her mother was born in Tennessee, but moved to Illinois at an early age.

By 1860 the family had moved to the village of Rockton, where Miss Hulett was enrolled in school. Also that year Mr. Hulett passed away leaving his wife and two daughters including Alta. Due to financial strain on the family with the father absent, Miss Hulett at the tender age of ten was required to quit school to become a telegraph operator in Rockton.

Miss Hulett's drive and persistence for an education did not keep her long working before she was back in school. Eventually the family home was sold in Rockton, and the family moved to Rockford to "enjoy the greater educational facilities of the town." Then in 1870, while only 16 years old, Miss Hulett graduated from the East Side High School.

What Miss Hulett did upon graduation is related in WOMEN OF THE CENTURY as follows:

"She at once began the study of law, although at this time the door to the profession seemed hopelessly closed against women, but the desire to become a lawyer had been an inspiration from early childhood, and being possessed of an indomitable will, which is a kind of genius, our heroine saw no alternative but to fulfill her destiny, which the ripening years seem also to favor. She entered, as a student in the law office of Mr. (Wm.) Lathrop of Rockford...."

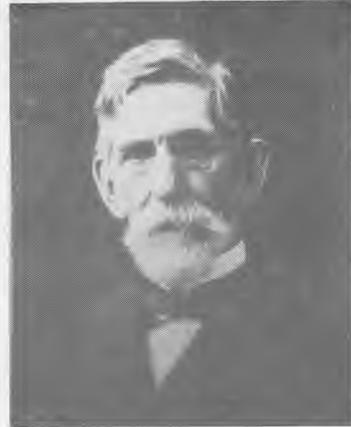
After only a few months of study in Mr. Lathrop's office Miss Hulett took the required examination for admission to practice law in 1871. After passing the examination she waited for her admittance, but none was forthcoming. Miss Hulett failed admission only because she was a woman.

In response to Miss Hulett's denial of admission, the REGISTER aptly had the following response:

"So it seems there may be brothers, but not sisters in law. Whatever opinions may be entertained as to the expediency of woman's entering the learned professions, we see no justice in closing the avenues to success by arbitrary distinctions in any of the departments of labor, physical or intellectual. All there should be left free to personal choice, and qualifica-



Alta M. Hulett



William Lathrop

tion. All these should be left free to personal choice. Our Western colleges and the best institutions of learning are opening their doors to all without distinction of sex. Exclusive privileges are surrendering to the advancement of equal rights. Why, then, should not the ways to prosperity and excellence be open to all throughout the realms of effort. What may be thought otherwise, the spirit and movement of the age are for a rational equality, and nothing - not even Supreme Courts - can stay the progress or prevent the triumph of just and liberal sentiments. Men have no objection to women in the home and social spheres. Why do men, or laws made by men, object to women in any sphere of useful and honorable exertion in which they may wish to meet!"

Understandably disappointed by her rejection, Miss Hulett did not accept the situation, but rather set about to change the situation. She became a school teacher in a rural school for a four-month term, but during this time she followed two courses of action. The first was to get an act passed in the Illinois legislature allowing women to be admitted to the legal profession. The second was to embark upon a lecture tour to gather support for the act.

With the encouragement of Mr. Lathrop, Myra Bradwell (the Chicago Legal News editor who was rejected by the United States Supreme Court in 1869 from being allowed to practice law because she was a married woman), and Lt. Gov. John D. Early, Miss Hulett drafted the following act which was introduced in the Illinois Legislature in 1872:

"Be it enacted by the people of the State of Illinois

represented in the General Assembly, that no person shall be precluded or debarred from any occupation, profession or employment (except military), on account of sex. Provided that this act shall not be construed to affect the eligibility of any person to an elective office.

"Nothing in this act shall be construed as requiring any female to work on streets or roads, or serve on juries.

"All laws inconsistent with this act are hereby repealed."

"Justice vs. The Supreme Court" was the title of Miss Hulett's lecture. The lecture was first given November 25, 1871, in Brown Hall. The hall was filled. A newspaper account of the lecture reported 400 people were turned away because the hall could handle no more. The REGISTER reported the lecture in part as follows:

"From the moment she uttered the first sentence it became apparent to all that fears of failure were useless, and that her success was a foregone conclusion. She commanded the close attention of her listeners, and perfect stillness prevailed during the whole lecture, except when broken by the rounds of applause that greeted the speaker at short intervals during the evening. We forebear commenting on her lecture in detail, and are content to say that it was a complete success. It was no tirade against the Supreme Court; she sought by sound and candid reasoning to convince the mind and judgments rather than to play upon the prejudices of her audience. She took the position that woman had a right to enter upon any honorable calling or profession that she could fit herself for, and that man had no right by unjust laws or by sentimental pretence, to circumscribe the field of labor or usefulness of women."

During the winter of 1871-72 Miss Hulett repeated the lecture in Freeport and other northern Illinois cities, but still Miss Hulett remained a teacher and not in her chosen profession.

In March of 1872 the General Assembly passed her act. Miss Hulett's reaction to this news is retold in WOMEN OF THE CENTURY:

"Miss Hulett was passing up the steps to her home one rainy day, when the telegram announcing that her bill had become a law was placed in her hands. Trembling in every limb, she read the dispatch, when her woman's nature asserted itself, and she sank upon the steps, regardless of the fast falling rain, and wept tears of joy. To use her own words in relating this incident, she said 'I shall never again know a moment of such supreme happiness.'"

After receiving this news and upon encouragement from friends, Miss Hulett moved to Chicago to begin again the study of law to take the exam she had successfully completed once before. In June of 1873 Miss Hulett took the examination in Mt. Vernon. This time she passed again and was admitted. The date she was admitted is reported either as June 6 or June 4, her 19th birthday. An account of her success is spoken of in the NEW YORK TIMES of June 30, 1873 as follows:

"Miss Hulett, Chicago's new lady lawyer, has studied

law three years, and was admitted to the Bar after a severe examination before the Supreme Court. There were twenty-three gentlemen in the class and she surpassed them all. The average age of the class was twenty-four and she was but nineteen."

Nineteen years old, young, beautiful, remarkable ability, what limitedless prospects for this accomplished individual. Such were the prospects for Miss Hulett in 1873. But life has its question marks of why? about it. Such a why? still is unanswered in respect to Miss Hulett.

The accounts report that Miss Hulett upon admittance maintained a lucrative business following general lines of work without limiting herself to any speciality, and succeeded marvelously well in handling her cases and disarming prejudice.

After approximately three years of practice in Chicago Miss Hulett for what the historian Church states were failing health reasons moved to California. On March 27, 1877, while only 22 years of age, Alta M. Hulett died in California. Saddened by her death, a special meeting of the Chicago Bar Association resolved:

"That while Miss Hulett's admission to the bar was a new and unprecedented event in this State, she was nevertheless cordially received and welcomed as a member thereof; and although so young when admitted and when she went away had been in practice but little over three years, she had won the respect and esteem of all who knew her whose friendship and regard were worth having, by her purity of character and womanly virtues, her honorable and courteous demeanor, and by her industry and diligence in business, as well as by the learning and ability, which young as she was, she displayed in an pre-eminent degree in the conduct of causes and business entrusted to her care."

As affirmed in the opening paragraph and after reviewing the events, it can be stated that it would have been a pleasure to have known and worked with this remarkable woman -- Alta M. Hulett.

A LADY OF SORROWS: CARRIE SPAFFORD BRETT
by Robert H. Borden

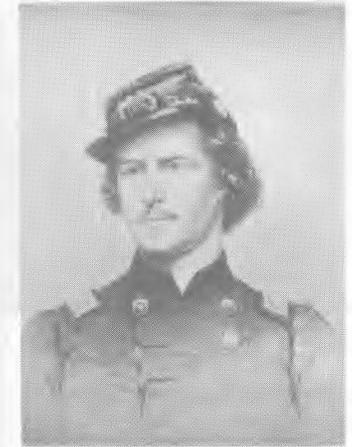
No headstone marks the grave of Carrie Spafford Brett in Cedar Bluff Cemetery. Perhaps she wanted it that way. A solitary white oak tree provides the only adornment on the resting place of Elmer Ellsworth's fiancee.

Caroline Spafford, known as "Kitty" to some of her friends but as "Carrie" to most, was less than fifteen years old when the dashing Major Ellsworth came into her life. An expert in "Zouave" drill, Ellsworth was spending the summer of 1858 in Rockford drilling the City Greys. Carrie was the oldest child of Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Spafford.

Charles Spafford was the oldest son of Dr. and Mrs. John Spafford of Adams, New York. He had first come



Carrie Spafford



Elmer
Ephraim
Ellsworth

to Rockford in 1839 while exploring several localities as places where he might settle. Rockford was his choice, so in 1840 he returned, bringing with him his brothers, John and Amos, as well as his brother-in-law, Jason Marsh. The four young men purchased a farm on Kishwaukee Street, and it was there that Charles Spafford brought his bride in 1842. The new Mrs. Spafford, the former Abby Warren, had come to Rockford in 1841 to keep house for her brother, Edward Warren, the village postmaster.

Carrie Spafford was born on December 2, 1843, in their brick farm house on Kishwaukee Street, but soon afterward the Spafford brothers gave up farming and moved to the growing village. In the 1850s Charles built the home which was to house the Spaffords and their descendants for almost ninety years. At first the address was "east side Main between Walnut and Oak, east side," as Rockford had no house numbers. Then for twenty years it was "206 South Main Street, east side". Because of the confusion caused by a Main Street on each side of the river, the Main Street on the east side was changed to Madison Street in 1887. The house numbering in Rockford was revised in 1894, and thereafter the Spafford's address was 220 South Madison Street.

Three more children were born to Charles and Abby Spafford. Daughter Mary, born in 1847, died in 1856 at the age of nine. The only son, Charles H., Jr., born May 22, 1852, received his education at Phillips Andover Academy and at Olivet College in Michigan. He held several jobs, as mailing clerk, second assistant post master, reporter, bookkeeper, and also helped his father supervise his real estate holdings. He never married, and spent most of the last years of his life traveling and reading; he died on



Charles Spafford
home at 220 South
Madison Street

January 3, 1908, at age fifty-five. The youngest child, Eugenia, was born in 1860.

As every student of Rockford history knows, Elmer E. Ellsworth, who became a close friend of Abraham Lincoln, met his death at the hands of an Alexandria, Virginia, innkeeper in May of 1861. Carrie had just turned seventeen the previous December. The love letters she had received from Ellsworth for almost three years indicated the depth



Charles Spafford
home and the old
Y.W.C.A. building
Spafford home was
razed to make room
for the new Y.W.C.A.

of his love for her, and everyone had assumed they would be married after the war. His letters to Carrie are now the property of the Illinois State Historical Society. Carrie's letters to Ellsworth were returned to her by a friend of his, and apparently were destroyed either by Carrie herself or by the family.

Life goes on in spite of sorrow, and on March 7, 1866, Carrie was married to Frederic E. Brett. They lived in Boston for several years, and then moved to Chicago where Mr. Brett was "connected" with the wholesale house of the Marshall Field Company. One child was born to Frederic and



Charles H. Spafford
family plot in
Cedar Bluff
Cemetery

Carrie Brett, a son, Charles S. Brett. He grew to manhood, and after graduating from Beloit College in 1892, he obtained a teaching position in St. Louis. Soon after beginning his career as a teacher he contracted typhoid fever, and on December 12, 1892, he died. Carrie's father, Charles Spafford had just died the previous September 9. As if this were not enough sorrow, her husband, Frederic, died in March, 1893, so within a period of six months Carrie lost her father, son, and husband. Her mother died July 19, 1901, and her brother in 1908.

Soon after the death of her husband, Carrie moved to Rockford. Her son and husband were buried at Cedar Bluff Cemetery, not far from her father and little sister, so she undoubtedly wanted to be nearer their graves. She moved in with her mother and brother, in the old home at 220 South Madison Street where she had experienced so much joy in the days before the Civil War. Not one to sit around and feel sorry for herself, Carrie again became active in the community; she was charter member and first regent of the Rockford Chapter of the D.A.R., assistant historian of the Daughters of 1812, chairman of the building committee of the Y.W.C.A., and a member of the Colonial Dames, the Outlook Club, and the Second Congregational Church.

Eugenia Spafford, Carrie's youngest sister, was only a year old when Ellsworth was killed. When she was born on April 9, 1860, the family had allowed Ellsworth the privilege of naming her. Although seventeen years apart in age Carrie and Eugenia became very close after the other members of the family had died. Eugenia married Charles H. Godfrey, a clothing merchant, and it was Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey who were with Carrie on October 8, 1911, when she passed away rather suddenly following a bout with "the grip". She was not quite sixty-eight years old. On October 10, the funeral, held in her home, was presided over by



Brett family plot in Cedar Bluff Cemetery. Headstone at the left marks the grave of son Charles S. Brett. Next to it is the headstone of Frederic E. Brett. The oak tree is on the grave of Carrie.

Rev. Thomas Barney Thompson of First Congregational Church, which had been the church of her father, and by Rev. P. M. Snyder of Second Congregational Church. Carrie was then laid to rest beside her husband and son in Cedar Bluff Cemetery.

Shortly after Carrie's death, Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey left their home on South Third Street and took up residence at 220 South Madison. Their unmarried daughter, Carolyn, lived with them. Mr. Godfrey died in 1922, but Eugenia and Carolyn stayed in the old homestead until 1940. After selling the home to Mr. and Mrs. Harry Severson, who then donated it to the Y.W.C.A., the Godfreys spent most of their time at a summer home at Lake Delavan, Wisconsin, where Carolyn ran a gift shop. Eugenia Spafford Godfrey died on May 27, 1945, at the age of eighty-five.

Miss Carolyn Godfrey, the last grandchild of Charles H. Spafford, died June 23, 1962, at age 76. Before she died, however, Carolyn made the "Godfrey Collection" available to Ruth Painter Randall in 1960 for use when preparing her biography of Elmer Ellsworth. Although called the "Godfrey Collection", these five hundred seventy-nine items were saved through the years by Carrie and the Spafford family. The collection was still in Carolyn Godfrey's possession when she died in 1962. As her only survivors were two nephews, Cecil H. Godfrey of Tempe, Arizona, and Warren S. Godfrey of Detroit, Michigan, and a niece, Mrs. Edgar Laird, Jr., of Bell, California, the collection is presumably now owned by one of them.

But at Cedar Bluff Cemetery Carrie still rests in an unmarked grave beneath the old oak tree. Judging by its size, the tree must have been planted there shortly after her burial. Could this have been by her request? Probably no one today knows the answer.

TABOR LUTHERAN CHURCH by Rich Kuchenreuther

The church has played an important role in the building of our country. Tabor Lutheran Church began almost fifty-two years ago in the Rockview area. In the fall of 1916 Pastor Hemdahl and Mr. Oscar Anderson met to talk about starting a Sunday School for all the children in the Rockview area.

Mr. Anderson owned a store on the corner of 20th Street and 14th Avenue, which is now known as Broadway. Mr. Anderson allowed his building to be used as a meeting place for the Sunday School for a rental fee of ten dollars a month. Sixty-two children were enrolled the first year. As the enrollment increased in the Sunday School, the need for a chapel arose.

Two lots on the corner of 12th Avenue and 19th Street were purchased in 1922 for \$825. A chapel building was soon begun, and on July 27, 1924, the Sunday School classes were held for the first time in the new chapel. It was called the Zion Lutheran Chapel. By the end of the year 156 children were enrolled.

With so many families in the Rockview area, it was soon thought that a congregation should be organized. On February 12, 1925, Tabor Lutheran Church was organized as a congregation. The first pastor was Rev. Elmer Friedlund. Services were conducted each Sunday in both Swedish and English.

After two years of service, Pastor Friedlund left, and Pastor Clarence Anderson was called to serve the church. No suitable house was to be found for the pastor, so the congregation decided to build a parsonage. It was constructed at 1331 19th Street, and was completed on November 10, 1928.

The congregation was growing, and soon the small sanctuary was not quite adequate. However, the great depression had begun, and for a time it seemed impossible to have a building project. But the hope and determination of the members eventually overcame adversity, and in 1934 they decided to build an addition to the Chapel. Much of the work was done by the members.

During the 1940s many things were happening. The nation was at war, attendance at services was greater than ever, and a new organ was installed. A Bible study group was started, and more remodeling was done.

In the fifties it was decided to build a new church on the same site, incorporating the old Chapel into the new structure. The first service in the new sanctuary was held on September 8, 1957. In 1968 Pastor Anderson retired as Tabor's senior pastor after forty-one years of service. He was then appointed Pastor Emeritus, and continued to serve Tabor as well as other churches in the community until his death in October of 1973. After Rev. Anderson's retirement Rev. Harvey M. Johnson became senior pastor of Tabor Lutheran Church, and continues to serve in that capacity.

Much hard work, faith and love and disappointments



CHAPEL
1924

have gone into the building of Tabor, as they have in the building of most congregations.

SEARCH FOR YOUR ROOTS!

by Robert H. Borden

The purpose of NUGGETS OF HISTORY is to shed new light on various aspects of our history which we feel have not been sufficiently explored in the past. This, of course, includes the lives of anyone who has ever lived in this area, as well as ancestors or descendants of past or present residents.

With this in mind, we are encouraging all of our members, or any other readers, to do some research in regard to their family's past. Some have already done this, but perhaps the information rests in a folder lying in some drawer. If so, let's get it out and write it up! Let's get great-great-grandpa's name in NUGGETS OF HISTORY, even if he never came close to Rockford. If you can obtain pictures, all the better, but they wouldn't be necessary.

Your editor has been indulging in this type of research for several months now. I never knew what my grandfather Borden's last name had been before he changed it to Borden. His obituary in 1942 had claimed that he was born in Småland, Sweden, "son of Nels and Sophie Gustafson". But where in Småland? After all, Småland is a big place. I

eventually found out that his birthplace was a town of As-keryd, and that the obituary was wrong; his parents were Karl Magnus and Gustava Charlotta Nilsson. Where the other names came from is a mystery. Karl Nilsson was the master gardener at an estate, called Bordsjö, which belonged to a count. When my grandfather changed his name from Johan Karlsson to John A. Borden, he was taking an American name as similar as possible to the name of the estate on which he grew up.

You will hear more of this in later issues. How about your roots? You'll have fun with this as I have!

WATER POWER SCRAMBLE

by W. Ashton Johnson

The fact that the famous Polish rights claim prevented Rockton from being surveyed until 1844, and five disastrous fires, were causes that brought about retardation of the finest water power site, and led industry to develop in Rockford.

Settled in 1835 by William and Thomas B. Talcott these pioneers were quick to sense the value of harnessing water power where a natural head of seven and a third feet existed. A bend in Rock River afforded opportunity to develop a race, dam the river, and raise the level another five feet. A federal government grant enabled Rockton pioneers to boast of the first power dam across Rock River in 1851.

By 1858, four paper mills produced a large volume of print and book papers and Rockton seemed headed for national prominence in this industrial field. The Enterprise Mill was erected in 1853; Bradner Smith & Company operated the first pulp mill in the midwest a year later, while the Winnebago paper mill showed \$105,000 in sales in 1855. Wright & Newcomb's mill was launched in 1869. Six large industrial plants were leveled by fire between 1857 and 1886. Of these, the Bradner Smith firm was burned out three times. Other losses that resulted in discouragement in further Rockton development were: Talcott & Co., flouring mill; Wright & Newcomb; Kenny Paper Mills, Coles & Gates flouring mill; Northwest Paper Mills.

State legislation of 1843 provided that a corporation could erect a dam for the development of water power, subject to a provision that the state could "take over ownership of said dam and locks if such action was deemed necessary". The state government did assume the cost of maintenance. Appointment of a Water Power Commission resulted in these appointees: Daniel S. Haight, Germanicus Kent, Samuel D. Preston, Laomi Peake, Charles I. Horsman, George Haskell, and J. C. Goodhue. The Rockford Hydraulic Co. was organized, and by the autumn of 1845, the dam and locks were completed. Made of timber cut from an 80-Acre grove, the water power firm chose a site a block north of the present Park Avenue. The error of their ways was manifested less than a year later, when nearly 200 feet from the east

shore gave way and carried an acre of land down stream. Twenty foot width mill races were designed on either side of the river, but two breaks caused losses to the James B. Howell Company; Gregory, Phelps & Daniels sawmill; and Orlando Clark's Iron Foundry on the west side. From 1847 to 1851 excellent water power was available for the new industries. On June 1st of that year, a serious flood caused the entire wooden dam and supports to wash out.

New legislation, designed to improve navigation and increase water power thereon, encouraged a new company to carry on industrial development along the banks of Rock River. Accordingly, the Rockford Water Power Co. was incorporated, which consolidated with the pioneer Hydraulic organization. In 1852 this group, headed by Messrs. John A. Holland, Thomas D. Robertson, Judge S. M. Church, C. I. Horsman, William Hulin, H. R. Maynard, and a dozen others, decided to erect a permanent dam across the river on the limestone bottom of the old ford. In May, 1853, the 760-foot long dam was completed. The main mill race was directed to the west side, due to currents and deviation of the main channel from east to west.

The arrival of John H. Manny of reaper fame was a boon to industrial expansion in 1853. The firm of Clark & Utter assumed manufacturing rights and produced 150 of the newly invented agricultural luxury. The next year saw a great demand for the reaper, and the J. H. Manny Co. with Wait and Sylvester Talcott as backers, manufactured 1,100 of the machines. Jesse Blinn and Ralph Emerson, hardware dealers, entered the firm as Manny and Company.

In 1855, the famous European trials of the reaper, arranged by Robert H. Tinker, resulted in a blue ribbon first prize at Paris. The year also brought public notice of the Cyrus H. McCormick patent infringement suit, during which Abraham Lincoln served as associate counsel.

After the death of Mr. Manny in 1856, the firm name was changed to Talcott, Emerson & Co. The N. C. Thompson Company was launched on the water power in 1857, and in 1860 John P. Manny, a cousin of John H. Manny who had been in charge of the sickle bar department of the original Manny firm, perfected his own combination reaper and mower and licensed the Thompson company to produce it.

Some of the other early day manufacturies in the water power district were: M. Bartlett & Co., a flouring mill; Thomas Derwent Company, millwork fixtures from native pine; Bertrand & Sames, manufacturers of hand cultivators; Trahern & Stuart, threshing machines (later originated the Trahern Pump Company); D. Forbes & Company, Malleable Iron Works; the Nelson Knitting Company (Nelson & Gent); Rockford Bolt Works; Rockford Brass Works; Blakeman & Dobson, dairy appliances such as barrel churns, butter-workers and stock tanks; and the Eclipse Gas Stove Company.

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