

Nuggets of History

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KATE O'CONNOR, ROCKFORD'S LEADING SUFFRAGETTE By Robert H. Borden

There was a time in Rockford when the name Kate O'Connor was almost a household word. Most people here knew who she was, even if they were not actually acquainted with her.

Kate was probably born about 1863, although her obituaries were rather indefinite on that point. One newspaper gave her age as 77 when she died in 1945, while the other stated she was 82, but neither gave the actual date of her birth. Kate probably would have preferred it that way.



KATE F. O'CONNOR.

One of eight children, Kate O'Connor was, according to her obituary, the youngest child of Cornelius V. and Mary O'Malley O'Connor. Cornelius died when the children were all quite young, so Mary had to fend for herself and do the best she could for her large flock. They lived wherever they could find the cheapest rent, and their home was at various times on Second Avenue, Sixth Street, Fourth Avenue, and for several years at 210 South Madison Street. Mary died April 3, 1900.

When interviewed later in her life, Kate O'Connor remembered that she had always been a tomboy. She also recalled a time when her mother, Mary, and several other women had gone to the polling place to vote for "local option" (against have liquor and saloons). They had been turned down, and this had seemed very unfair to young Kate, who thereupon vowed to fight for woman suffrage.

After graduating from Rockford High School, Miss O'Connor was deputy county clerk for several years. She then started her own business, renting office space in the Brown Building on South Main Street. She listed her services as "Pensions, Loans, Real Estate and Insurance. Probate Matters a Specialty." Kate's sisters Anne and Elizabeth became dressmakers, while brother Charles became a house painter, and brother Joseph a blacksmith. Brother Cornelius, Jr., moved to Belvidere while quite a young man, and sister Margaret married Thomas Weldon in 1883.

Kate's business in the Brown Building prospered, and in about 1908 she and her two unmarried sisters moved to 1011 Franklin Place. During this time Kate was one of the leading crusaders for the Nineteenth Amendment. She campaigned throughout the Middle West to gain support for woman suffrage. Years later she recalled that when she was a little girl she had once heard that Susan B. Anthony was

coming to town and would speak at Metropolitan Hall. Kate vowed to attend, and sat enthralled during Miss Anthony's address. "I never forgot it," she said, "for it seemed to become a part of me, and later, during the last visit of Miss Anthony to Chicago, I had the privilege of speaking on the same platform at the old Auditorium and received her commendation." In 1909 Miss O'Connor was the Democratic candidate for Winnebago County Superintendent of Schools, but lost the election.

Kate O'Connor was described as being brusque in manner but warmhearted and genial. She usually wore a man's tie and rather masculine clothing for her day. As stated, she had been a tomboy in her youth, and she continued that trait into later life. A charter member of the Illinois League of Women Voters, Kate was also a participant in various women's clubs, Girl Scouts, the Illinois Women's Press Association, and the Rockford Business and Professional Women's Club. One of her treasured possessions was a certificate signed by Carrie Chapman Catt and presented to Miss O'Connor in 1920 by the National American Woman Suffrage Association. It read: "The National American Woman Suffrage Association declares that Kate O'Connor is entitled to a place on the honor roll of the brave army of men and women who have rendered distinguished service to the cause of woman suffrage."

About 1914 Miss O'Connor moved her business to Chicago and had an office in the Stock Exchange Building on South LaSalle Street. In the same year she moved her family to 525 Indian Terrace. Five years later she returned to Rockford and opened a real estate office in the Trust Building, where it remained until 1933.

In 1928 or '29, Kate O'Connor was elected secretary of the newly-formed Karlson's Klister Manufacturing Company, and she remained as corporate secretary at Karlson's until its reorganization in the middle 1930s as Testor Cement Company. However, she continued as a realtor during that time.

In 1933 Miss O'Connor was appointed by Governor Henry Horner as Chief of the Division of Women and Children of the State Department of Labor. She was thus the first woman code officer in Illinois and the first of her sex to be confirmed by the Illinois Senate. This position made it necessary for her to return to Chicago to live. She served in that capacity until 1942, when she was appointed assistant to Thomas D. O'Malley, regional director of the Wage and Hour Division, United States Department of Labor, with offices in the Merchandise Mart. During this period she also served as president of Chicago Lodge, No. 648, of the American Federation of Government Employees. When she resigned from that position in early 1945, she was made honorary president for life.

Miss O'Connor's last residence was an apartment at 240 East Delaware Street in Chicago, where on May 2, 1945, she was stricken with a heart attack. She was taken to St. Luke's Hospital, where she died on May 25, 1945. Barney Thompson, in his "Column Left" in the REGISTER-REPUBLIC,

described Kate O'Connor as "a grand woman, -- vivid, vivacious, colorful. Her deepest interests were to help remove the hardships and handicaps of the workers of Illinois, and her labor...with the federal government and the state was in protecting women in their wages and hours and children against any unscrupulous exploitation." In an editorial the MORNING STAR said "...she was a major connecting link with the great woman's suffrage evangel of the early part of the century. She numbered among her friends the great feminists of that generation....Her vigorous, challenging diary is now closed by death, but we think the last entry must have been -- It was good to have lived in these spirited times!"

DOZENS OF AWARDS ARE INCIDENTAL
by Hazel M. Hyde

Dr. Mildred Freburg Berry (Mrs. James) is proud to have been one of seven daughters of a Scandinavian farmer living near Pomeroy, Iowa. This town with population of 870 was "on and off the map due to a cyclone," she explains. But Rockford knows her best as author, teacher, lecturer and civic leader. A resume of nine single-spaced pages lists her career activities and honors. She is representative of the accomplishments of women that is hailed each spring as "Woman's History Week". Twenty certificates and awards attest to national and local recognition. Eleven lectureships in foreign countries between 1970 and 1980 dealt with oral language development and linguistic disorders. About 60 workshops and seminars on speech and hearing disorders and rehabilitation took her to nearly all localities in United States. Memberships and activities include over twenty-five organizations in which she worked actively, usually on the board, or as president, or giving lectures. Over 75 talks were given to community organizations from 1970-1982. Over a dozen publications are listed to her credit. She held three Fulbright Lectureships in Oslo, Norway 1952-53; Aarhus, Denmark 1956-57, and Ankara, Turkey 1962 for 7 months as well as summer sessions as lecturer University of Toronto 1952-53.

My acquaintance with Dr. Berry came through Rockford Branch of AAUW, of which she was a charter member helping in its organization. I applauded and took her picture when she was honored as a fifty year member. Mildred Freburg Berry received bachelor and master's degrees from the University of Iowa where she had graduated summa cum laude in 1922, and Ph.D. from University of Wisconsin 1937 with additional study at Harvard Medical School and Northwestern University.

Many people think of Mildred Berry as a woman of great dignity, and, of course, she is when she receives an award or represents an organization, but she is a person of lively wit and every-day common sense. In 1983 she received the Rockford Excalibur Award in recognition of



Dr. Mildred Berry, one of the founders of the Rockford Chapter of AAUW (American Association of University Women), receiving recognition as a 50 year member.

outstanding contributions to the community and she went about happily congratulating the other 49 of us honorees whose names the Rockford Newspaper put in very fine print.

"Memories of a Swedish Christmas" is a charming Berry story found in Christmas in Iowa published by Midwest Publishing Company, Iowa City, 1979. More professional are her Language Disorders in Children 1969 and Teaching Linguistically Handicapped Children 1980 both published by Prentice Hall along with her other publications.

Rockford College saw many of her major academic achievements after she joined the faculty in 1926, with four years of experience as speech instructor at the University of Iowa, Iowa City. During her thirty-six years there she founded and directed a training center for children with speech handicaps. I knew personally an intelligent Black boy whose speech was difficult to understand. After his work with Dr. Berry and, I believe, a remedial operation, he spoke more clearly and has taken a place of importance in the local community.

Dr. Berry looks back on extensive travel in Europe, Scandinavia, the Orient, the Middle East, England and Wales as well as many areas of the United States.

Among her local honors are Rockford College Alumnae Award 1962 and Mary Ashley Cheek Award 1981 and Rockford Rotary "Service Above Self" 1976. Among the professional awards are American Speech and Hearing Association "Honors of the Association" 1971; Illinois Speech and Hearing Association "Honors" 1978, and an Honorary Life membership 1971, and Wisconsin Speech and Hearing "Honors" 1981.

American Association of University Women's Centennial

Award for Achievement in the Field of Education" was presented to her in Boston at the Centennial Convention to celebrate one hundred years of AAUW in 1981. The Mildred Freeburg Berry Foundation of \$25,000 was set up as a research and projects endowment. This was a fitting honor as she had been Illinois State President 1935-1937.

After giving me the copy of her resume that I had requested, Mildred Berry said people would find such a list boring to read! How can we be aware of the time and energy women have given in service if we find a listing of their contributions too long to examine? Of course dozens of awards are incidental -- it is the work that they represent and the results obtained that are important.

Friends of Mildred Berry think of her as an alert woman ready to defend an opinion or to work for the accomplishment of a goal. Her personality is outgoing, friendly, and helpful. She has a keen understanding of community problems and involvement in various areas for solving them and making existing organizations work to the advantage of Rockford. Her Scandinavian background enables her to help preserve the best of that culture and tradition while being a force in upholding principles of her political affiliation and her views on the needs of her country. She has a love for the Rockford community that she translates into action.

MARY L. CARPENTER, EIGHTH COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
(From THE HISTORY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN WINNEBAGO COUNTY by Charles Espy)

Mrs. Mary L. Carpenter, born in Greenbush, New York, in 1839, received her early public school training in Rochester, New York, where her parents had moved when she was a child. She was graduated with honor from a classical course of study at the Fort Plain Collegiate Institute at the age of seventeen. She arrived at Waterloo, Iowa, soon after where she taught in the village school.

She married in 1857 and moved to Rockford where she took an active interest in education and served for a number of years as a teacher in the Rockford public schools. Mrs. Carpenter's election as county superintendent in 1873 carried the added responsibility of supervising the normal department at the Rockford Female Seminary. When she assumed these duties, a prominent Illinois educator offered this tribute:

"The high culture and great energy which Mrs. Carpenter possesses eminently fits her for the superintendency. The esteem in which she is held by her fellow teachers is shown by her selection as secretary of the State Teachers Association."

During her tenure Mrs. Carpenter authored several papers, two of which were read before a meeting of the Illinois Association of County Superintendents. One, entitled



MRS. MARY L. CARPENTER.
County Superintendent of Schools 1873-1882.

"Best Methods of Bringing Directors Up to Their Duties," contained the following passage:

"First, bringing county superintendents up to their duty; we should be active ourselves; never dilatory; prompt to meet all engagements; ready to cooperate with school officers in the performance of their duties, thereby inspiring them with our enthusiasm. Divide the time in supervision between teachers and school officers."

Mrs. Carpenter lived at 506 Catlin Street in Rockford after leaving the superintendency in 1882. She operated a select school on East State Street during the 1885-86 school year and later established classes in the 100 block of West State Street. Mrs. Carpenter remained in Rockford until her death in April of 1899.

JAYNE POOR'S IMPACT ON THE LIVELY ARTS by Hazel M. Hyde

A program given by Miss Jayne Poor and illustrated by a group of dancers beautifully examined Modern Dance. Jayne Poor is one of Rockford College's "jewels" among a goodly number of outstanding professors, administrators, and instructors over the years. Her co-entertainers that linger in my mind were Annie Stowe, a graduate dance major, Sally Ketner and Penna Houy both Rockford College dance majors, and David Burton connected with Rockford School of Medicine but with a great interest in dance. Miss Poor explained the basic elements found in all dance.

Modern Dance tends to be freer in form than classical ballet but with a degree of discipline. Also the program showed how the choreographer goes through the process of creating a dance.

Jayne Poor's credentials include a M.S. Degree in dance from University of Wisconsin, Madison; a Fullbright fellowship to study in West Berlin, Germany, with Mary Wigman, famous in German modern dance; sabbatical study with Alwin Nikolain and Murray Louis in New York City; attendance at several intensive workshops at a small, lovely college in Cornwall, England, on authentic Renaissance dance; summers at the University of Connecticut and in Colorado Springs with Hanya Holm; and number of choreographic workshops and seminars on square dance and social dance. There were various studies with dance artists in Copenhagen, London, Geneva, and in Germany.

In the lively arts Miss Poor is best known for her career at Rockford College that spans a time period from the administration of Dr. Mary Ashley Cheek on the downtown campus to the present administration of the college on East State Street.

Miss Poor tells how she came to Rockford College to become chairman of the Dance Department and the Physical Education Department on the campus beside Rock River. Jayne had learned from Bonnie Torrence, who was expecting her fourth child, that her position would be vacant. Following an interview with Dr. Mary Ashley Cheek, Jayne became a faculty member of Rockford College. If she had not attended this alumni meeting, where she had been granted her M.S. Degree in dance, much would have been different.

Although she had danced from the age of eight, and studied ballet, point or toe dancing, tap and exhibition ballroom dance in a studio while growing up in Streator, Illinois, her career choice was not decided, even after attending Stephens College, Columbia Missouri, for two years. She took a B.A. Degree in Literature at University of Colorado at Boulder.

Between Stephens College and going back to college, Miss Poor danced professionally, mostly at U.S.O. She entertained troops with dance first in the United States, then in Europe. A memorable tour was in the musical "Irene" as a singer and dancer in the American 2nd British zones, in Austria and Germany.

In Streator, Jayne Poor taught sixth and seventh grades. Also she substituted in Spanish and English in high school. It was a natural choice to attend the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and prepare for a college dance career. Study in this country and abroad enlarged her grasp of the dance art.

After Rockford College moved to its present location, physical education was separated from the dance department. It was a welcome change when the dance was moved to Clark Art Center with other performing arts. There was a new dance studio with dance mirrors, portable barres, and lighting. Seating for informal performances was provided.

Other dance was in Maddox Theatre. Although she taught most of the dance, there were two faculty members who taught ballet and jazz as well as to help chorograph for productions. "It is very exciting," confided Miss Poor. Her creative ideas led to innovative modern dance and the students cooperated in creating dances.

Although rehearsals, classes, and performances demanded much time, about a dozen years ago she collaborated with Chuck Hoenes in establishing Rockford Dance Company. These two were co-artistic directors of the company until the past year. They were responsible for artistic planning, chorographing, and the teaching of some company classes. When Mr. Hoenes left to pursue his career in Florida, Miss Poor decided to retire from the company.

This well-known woman has established a tradition that has had dramatic impact on the lively arts of Rockford. Jayne Poor stated, "I am very interested in the development of the creative potential in dance with young dancers and particularly like that creative process in working together."

GERTRUDE ADOLPH MEAD, PAST PRESIDENT
by Mrs. Harold B. Hyde

Gertrude Adolph Mead (Mrs. Harold) was the eighth president of Rockford Historical Society during the years 1978-1980. During her administration many of the meetings were held in the Heritage Room of the Home Federal Savings and Loan Association, 1107 East State Street. I remember a meeting July 16, 1979, when I gave a slide program "The History of Rock River". There was our president spreading out cookies for the refreshments and checking on the coffee pot along with two or three other willing workers. This pattern has continued for in 1986 the board member, Gertrude Mead, was active around the coffee pot and cake after a long business meeting of the board.

Mrs. Henry Utter, a life member of Rockford Historical Society came from her home in Chicago, September 20, 1979. She presented to Rockford Museum Center a picture of Silas Utter of Utter Manufacturing Company on the Water Power. Gertrude helped organize a "Dutch Treat" luncheon for Mrs. Utter. Among those at the luncheon besides Gertrude were: Clem Burns, Mary Henderson, Vi Burden, Harold and I and Bill and Antoinette Ralston. She made certain that I had brought my camera for the occasion. Her aptitude for handling details is remarkable.

The most important project of the two year period that Gertrude Mead served as president of Rockford Historical Society was the reprinting of Charles A. Church's Past and Present of the City of Rockford and Winnebago County, published 1905 by J.S. Clark Publishing Company. In fine print the words assisted by H.H. Waldo appeared under Mr. Church's name. The reprint was by Unigraphic Inc., Evansville, Indiana.



Gertrude Adolph Mead, recipient of the Talcott Cross from Rockford College in recognition of her dedicated service to the college over many years.

Almost to be considered as a separate project was the creation of an every name index for the church history book. There were about thirty members of the Rockford Historical Society involved. The names I remember were: Mabel Golding, Faithe Armstrong and Mary Henderson. Clem Burns had been a major factor in starting the undertaking. Taylor Decker was in charge of distribution. There were 82 pages of index of just names, not events. Many names were done in triplicate. Example: Mrs. Harold Mead, Gertrude Mead, Gertrude Adolph.

Another undertaking was the reprinting of the Heritage Recipes first published by Rockford Historical Society in 1972. MMes. Marvin Alden, Denis Carratt, H. D. Condon, Sandy Hucker, Brice Sheets; Mr. and Mrs. Clement Burns, Mr. and Mrs. Harold B. Hyde, Miss Betty Burns, and Miss Emma Lundgren. The cover was the A.C. Spafford House. Other houses of historic interest were Willard Wheeler House and Walter Peck House. Several people made drawings and I signed mine but the others did not. Gertrude was on the board the year we made the original cookbook. Pat Daughenbaugh had charge of the reprint distribution.

It was probably during the Mead term of office that the society began having the Junior Historians exhibit their projects and explain them at the annual meeting.

The Bylaws of the society were revised in June of 1980.

The tours had started in the previous president's term. Clem Burns and Stuart Golding had planned our first tours.

Several years ago it was suggested that our quarterly, Nuggets of History, should tell about present day people who are making history. One idea was that our presidents who work so patiently for the society should be good subjects for articles. Several have been interviewed and some of their achievements written up. In my "scattered files" there are tape recordings of interviews with two

Rockford Historical Society Presidents. These await a session of transcribing. Already some of the memories become rusty. It seems interesting to know something of the person, their youth, their other interests.

Thinking back over the years, I recall a very special meeting in the Mead home. Harold Mead was then the active member in Rockford Historical Society work. Carl Severin was then explaining about his gift of land for a Rockford Museum Center. Mr. Ralston agreed to serve on a committee. The Board was planning its involvement along with the Swedish Historical Society and the Harlem Historical Society. The Rockford Park Board would make an agreement if the three societies would cooperate in the project. Some spouses of the board were present, I recall. Gertrude was the quiet shadow that brought more coffee and listened carefully to the "dream" since realized on Guilford Road. It was after the shock of Harold Mead's death that Gertrude became deeply involved in Rockford Historical Society's activities. She also gave her time and energy in work for the museum.

Harold and Gertrude Mead were house parents 1941-November 1950 at the Rockford College Farm. The summer session 1950 was the summer that I unexpectedly was employed to teach American history at Rockford College because of Dr. Brush's retirement. One very wonderful experience to me was being a part of the college picnic "as a member of the faculty"! Two very pleasant people were introduced as houseparents. Dr. Mary Ashley Cheek wore a ribbon or a scarf around her hair tied in a bow. Gertrude remembers one such picnic when a thunderstorm came up and everyone moved onto the front porch. After that I was a consultant on campus at intersession several summers.

Under similar circumstances Gertrude was invited to teach at Rockford College on the campus beside Rock River. The years were February 1950-September 1953. The instructor had become ill and it was expected that she would teach only a few weeks but the time extended to three and a half years. She was teaching home economics to college students and to nurses. Then there was a year and half that she taught University of Illinois Extension classes. At about the same time the University of Illinois was working with Rockford Public schools and I was one of the teachers in the project, using certain techniques and subject matter and meeting regularly with a history profession from the University to evaluate results in classes at Washington Junior High School. Imagine the "fun" of being issued a University faculty parking permit! The two of us had a lovely time comparing notes the day of the interview, February 4, 1986.

For a number of years the Garden Department of Rockford Woman's Club has been one of Gertrude's interests. She has been Program Chairman of B Group most recently. Any group to which she belongs receives the benefit of her energies. She gives programs and she entertains the department in her home. She is a volunteer in a number of community enterprises and a member who understands the word "active to mean a willingness to work. Her garden

has berries, producing tomato plants, and both perennial and annual flowers.

A "profile" of Gertrude Mead, Membership Chairman for Friends of the Rockford Museum Center and Midway Village gave me the "nudge" to complete the article on our hard-working board member. Her committee has brought the Museum Friends roll to the all-time highpoint. She started as a docent, and has served as treasurer, vice president, and president of Friends. She attended a week-long workshop on wardrobe restoration at the University of Minnesota. She has used her skill to help repair garments from the "outstanding collection" of period clothing at Rockford Museum Center.

John Peter Adolph, known as J.P. was the father and Emma was the mother of Gertrude Adolph. Her father was an immigrant from Germany at the age of sixteen, coming to this strange country alone. Dorothea, Florence, and Lydia were her three sisters and John was her brother. German was not spoken in their home when Gertrude was born. This octogenarian was a year and a half old when her parents moved to Rockford. She remembers German cookies at Christmas time made from her Grandmother's recipes.

Seventy-five years ago, she told Cathy Ward of Rockford Register Star (See January 31, 1985 issue), Gertrude Adolph paraded with her classmates to the new P. R. Walker School. (See Nuggets of History Vol 16 No 3 Summer 1979 pp 10-12 and Summer 1979 pp 1-11 "Peleg Remington Walker" by Hazel M. Hyde) She was a second grade pupil. Her class had started the school year at Garrison School. She finished eight grades of schooling in six and a half years.

She was a graduate of Rockford College in 1926. Gertrude has been awarded the Talcott Cross in recognition of her dedicated service to the college over many years. In 1928 she married Harold Mead, a Rockford native. Their son Tom, a CPA, is a Rockford College trustee. He and his wife have two children and live in Arlington Heights. Her daughter Mary and husband also have two children and their home is in Richland, Washington.

Gertrude taught nutrition and chemistry at Rockford Memorial Hospital. After World War II she taught veterans under the GI Bill. Her teaching career had begun at Marengo High School where she taught clothing, physics, and girls' physical education. In Rockford Public Schools she did substitute teaching. She points out that she did many different things in short periods of time, sometimes with overlapping commitments.

You may meet her at Rockford Woman's Club or on some special day at Rockford Museum Center. So varied are her interests that you might find her at most events you are likely to attend.

Of a total of ten presidents only three have been women. The society has been fortunate in its choices for someone "to lead". Each president has inspired the membership and thus achieved much. As one member said, "We are making

history." So we look back to the good things of the past and constantly plan for the future.

LYDIA GREGORY, THE WELL-LIKED PRINCIPAL
Educator for 46 Years

When Lydia Gregory was brought by her parents to the Rockford area in 1881, she was a girl of fourteen. When she died in 1957, she was a greatly beloved retired teacher and principal of eighty-nine.

Lydia E. Gregory was born at Mooers, New York, on November 3, 1867. Her parents were Mr. and Mrs. William H. Gregory. The family came to this area about 1881. After attending the public schools, young Lydia attended Rockford Business College, operated at that time by George A. Winans and H. A. Stoddard. It was sometimes referred to as the Winans and Stoddard Business School. This may have been the only advanced education Miss Gregory had when she began her teaching career in 1885. About 1907 she took a leave of absence to gain additional schooling.

By 1889 Lydia Gregory was teaching at the old Nelson School at the corner of Ninth Street and Tenth Avenue. Mrs. Marie Rice was the principal. About 1891 Miss Gregory transferred to Kent School on South Winnebago Street, but when Brown School opened in 1892 with Mrs. Rice as its first principal, Lydia Gregory was again teaching on the east side of the river. Brown School was located at the corner of Sixteenth Avenue and Eighth Street. Miss Gregory continued at Brown School for the remainder of her long career, and in 1910 she became the second principal of Brown, succeeding Mrs. Rice who died in May of 1910. When Hallstrom School opened in the 1920, Miss Gregory became its first principal, but she also continued as principal of Brown School, retiring from both in 1931.

Lydia Gregory took pride in the successes of her students. Among "her boys", as she called them, were the late Mayor C. Henry Bloom, Attorney Alf Ahlstrand, Dr. Perry Anderson, Professor Henry Carlson of Elmhurst College, industrialist A. J. Standquist, and musician-businessman Sigfrid Sandeen. Many of her students remembered her on her birthdays long after her retirement, and they paid for a trip to California for her as a retirement present.

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