

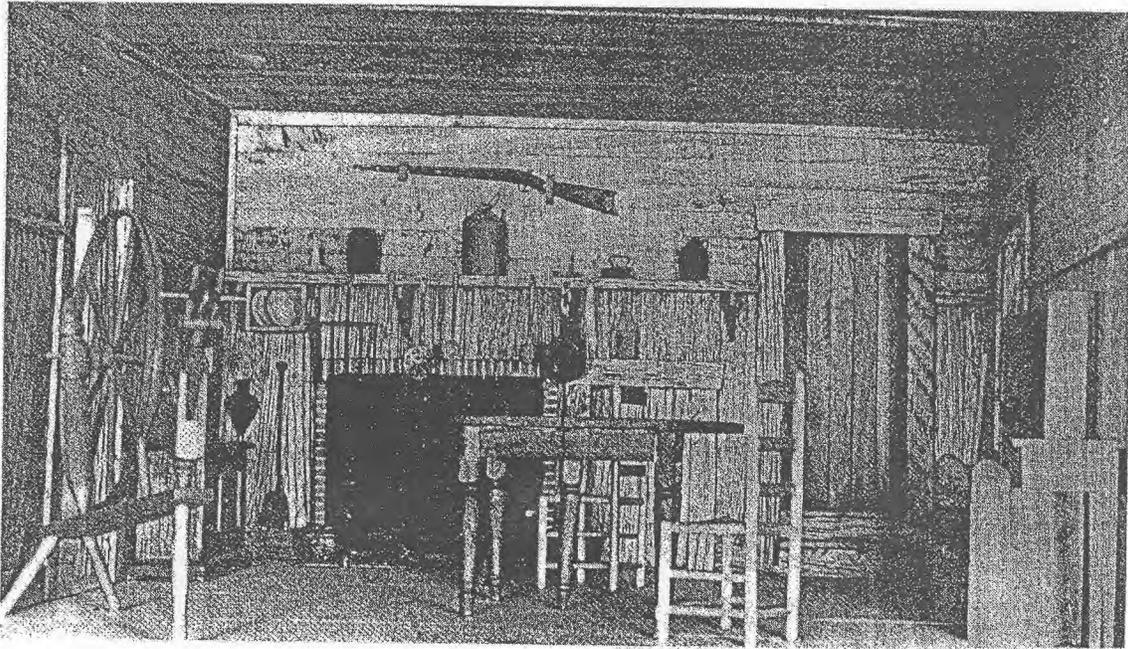
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# NUGGETS OF HISTORY

VOLUME 44 SEPTEMBER 2006 NUMBER 3

## VOICES FROM THE WINNEBAGO COUNTY FRONTIER

By John L. Molyneaux



The interior of a pioneer cabin

*Courtesy of the Illinois State Historical Library*

A pioneer cabin from the Illinois frontier.

Reprinted from: *The Prairie State – A Documentary History of Illinois, Colonial Years to 1860.*  
Edited by Robert P. Sutton. Published by William B Erdmann's Publishing Co., 1976

## JANE ADDAMS – PRACTICAL IDEALIST

By Sue Crandall

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

This issue presents two articles. The first presents a different side of frontier life. In the 1840s the local newspapers printed poetry written and submitted by local residents. This article presents a selection of these poems. Most of us would have a hard time envisioning people who had to endure the hardships of life on the frontier having the time or the inclination to write poetry, but they did. Many of you know Dr. Molyneaux from his position as the Local History Librarian at the Rockford Public Library, a position he held over twenty years until his recent retirement. Originally from New York State, he received his Ph.D. in History from the University of Virginia. Dr. Molyneaux taught at Rockford College before taking the position with the library. He is also a board member of the Rockford Historical Society.

The second article is from Sue Crandall and is adapted from a presentation she did for the Rockford Historical Society. Sue is a past President of the Rockford Historical Society. She and her husband Jack have both been long time board members. Sue has worked for many years for the Convention and Visitors Bureau giving tours of Rockford historical sites. She is also serving on the Program committee for Midway Village.

## IDEA FOR AN ARTICLE?

If you have a subject that you have researched, or an idea for an article that you would like to pursue, give me a call. I would like to encourage original research into some aspects of local history that have not been adequately pursued. I can be reached at 885-1740.

Thomas Powers, Editor

## MEMORIAL RECEIVED

The Rockford Historical Society would like to acknowledge a Memorial we received for Russ Miller. Russ, who passed away in July, was a teacher at Wilson and West Middles Schools for over 35 years. He was also a past President of the Rockford Historical Society. He will be remembered by his many friends and former students.

## VOICES FROM THE WINNEBAGO COUNTY FRONTIER

By John L. Molyneaux

In the 1840s Rockford newspapers published poetry composed by area readers. This provided an opportunity for poets (or would-be poets) to try their talent and it allows later generations to hear real voices of real people speaking directly of their situations and concerns.

Winnebago County was settled by Americans only in the mid 1830s, so the locale itself provided a topic. In March 1849 "E. M. G." of Rockton, in "Illinois Song," recounted the difficulties and prospects of life on the Rock River frontier:

Come all who love mosquitoes, and lazy, stagnant sloughs,  
And rambling o'er prairies, to chase away the "blues",  
With *gentle* "fevernager" and every sister joy,  
O, come and buy a farm in this our Illinois.

But human enterprise would overcome this, as the eastern cities would soon discover:

But few with thriving Rockford in enterprise compare,  
We soon shall pass the East by - Schenectady and Troy,  
Will have to yield the palm to this, a town in Illinois.

We love our happy country, and bid her now God Speed,  
Mosquitoes, or the ague, can never quite destroy  
The glories of our country--of this our Illinois.

A different vision, without the mosquitoes and illnesses, was presented by "H.", in "My Home" (August 1848): "Here lies the ample prairie's wide expanse/Wrapt in a gorgeous sheet of living green," and through this prairie

Rock-River pours its grand pellucid stream  
Here down the green and flowery dappled vale,  
And there its silver tide bold glides supreme,  
With noiseless flow along the woodland dale  
Without a ripple on its shining face...

The American settlers had minimal direct contact with the native inhabitants, the Winnebago and Pottawatomie peoples who had been forcibly removed westward by 1838. There were Indian remains to be seen, however, most impressively ceremonial and burial mounds. P. J. Randolph of Harrison examined them and was moved to muse on antiquity in general, and the transitory nature of human existence ("Graves of the Ancients Near Rock River," April 1845):

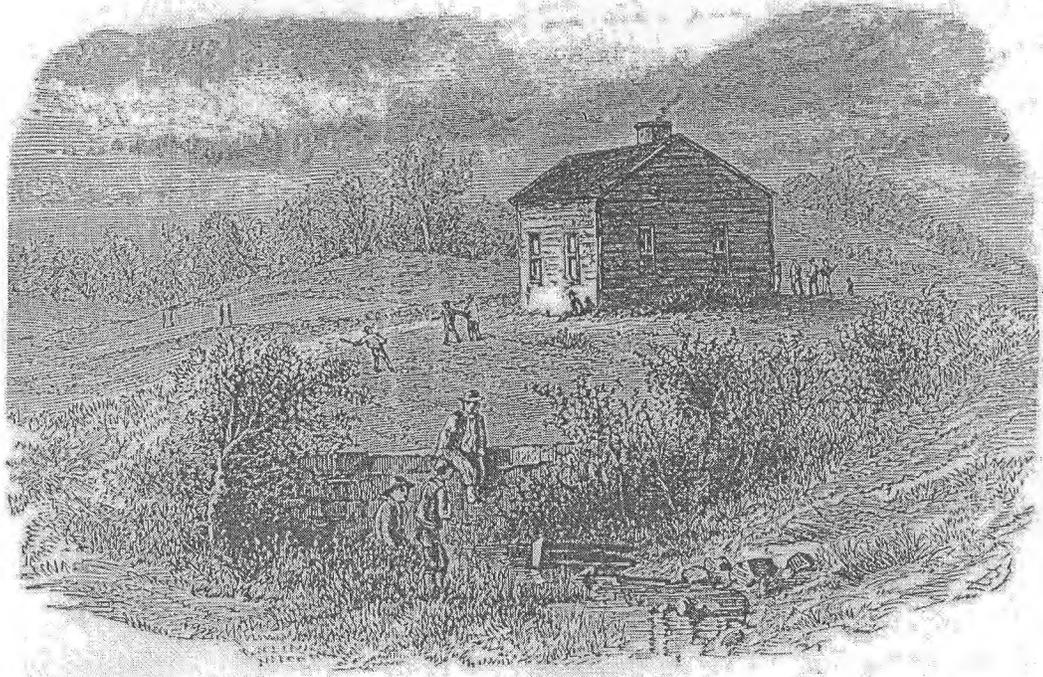
We like they must turn to dust,  
Whether evil, whether just,  
For 'twill soon be said of us,  
Here's their tombs.

Others, like Herva Jones, merely wondered, like tourists ("The Indian's Grave," February 1848):

This mound was built by artists rude,  
And no inscription there was seen,  
And I bethought me as I stood,  
What could the workmanship have been....

I thought of nations past and gone,  
And whispered, 'tis an Indian's grave.

The American settlers were not interested in such remains and the mounds were seen as odd parts of the landscape.



A PIONEER SCHOOL HOUSE.

The authors of these poems may have gone to schools such as this one.  
Source: *The History of Winnebago County, ILL*, published 1877 by H.F. Kett & Co.,  
Chicago.

Social and political issues drew comment. S. C. Manchester spoke of one in "New Temperance Song" (March 1849):

Let auld acquaintance be forgot,  
That dupe us with their rum,  
No more shall they our senses steal,  
For drunkards they've become.

Another writer, Lovell, spoke (at least poetically) from personal experience ("A Drunkard's Farewell to His Cup," January, 1848):

Farewell, false pleasures all, farewell!  
A Demon's tongue would scarcely tell  
What you have brought me to:  
Despis'd by others and myself,  
I am a most abhorrent elf  
And this was caused by you...

But now methinks I've got a plan  
By which I either may or can  
Avoid the shame and pain.  
'Tis this-when I am asked to take  
"A little for the stomach's sake,"  
I'll keep my reason "wide awake."  
And cry-Abstain! Abstain!

S. C. Manchester was concerned with another great social evil as well: slavery. He wrote in "Scene in Tennessee Slave Market" (June 1849):

In succession six dear children,  
To soul-killers were disposed,  
Vended by the human dealer  
For the profits it imposed!

Who shall answer at the judgment?  
(A certain doom we all must wear)  
For the shortened life of negroes-  
Answer Christian if you dare!

Anti-slavery sentiment was ubiquitous in Winnebago County, affecting all political persuasions deeply. The Mexican War of 1846-1848 was bitterly opposed, seen as a vicious and unwarranted extension of slavery, an evil waste of life and treasure. P. J. Randolph expressed the county's feelings in "The Consequences of Oppression" (March 1848).

And where is the help for this sin accursed land,  
That wears the thin film of Christianity's veil,  
And mocks at the sound of the slave's helpless wail  
And yields to oppression the vote, purse, and hand...

To slavery we owe all the wealth or the glory,  
That the down-trodden Mexican forced may yield,  
For the bones of his foes on the mountain and field  
Shall bleach while the echoing song or the story  
Shall wither the power his conquerors wield.

The tears of the Mexican mother that fall  
For the slain of her home, for the son and the sire,  
Her country's defense and the funeral pyre,  
On the heads of invaders a vengeance shall call,  
To curse even the homes of the foes that retire.

On the dark page of infamy, written in blood,  
Stands our nation's defense of slavery and crime,  
In the eyes of the world on the current of time,  
With the banners of freedom o'er mountain and flood,  
And the hypocrite front of religion sublime.

In the 1848 presidential campaign the nationally victorious Whig candidate, Zachary Taylor, carried Winnebago County by less than 60 votes. Former president Martin Van Buren and the abolitionist Free Soilers lost the county, but so close was the election the local Whig party was badly shaken. The Whigs were anti-slavery, but they were also anti-Abolitionist, and their days of supremacy in the county were clearly drawing to a close. Herva Jones gave voice to abolitionist fervor in "Free Soil," published in September 1848 in the heat of the election:

Give ear ye ranting slavers of the South,  
And yes their servile agents of the North...  
Ten thousand pent up fires are bursting forth!  
And Freedom's beacon light illumines the land,  
While hearts in warm anticipation boil,  
With hope to view her rule with chainless hand,  
And with each willing echo shout "Free Soil!"

The discovery of gold in California in 1848 produced the nationwide and irrational frenzy of the Forty-Niners. Winnebago county was immediately infected by gold fever and scores of its citizens headed west in the next several years, many leaving permanently. In Rockton, two poets, "E. M. G." and Sarah Fassett, responded differently to the phenomenon, and their poems were published together in the *Rockford Free Press* on February 10,

1849. Each one was entitled "California Song" and each relies on the pronunciation Cal-i-forn-i-a in their verses:



The gold rush was open to people of all races as this photo illustrates. Source: Pictorial History of California by Paul C. Johnson, published 1970 by Doubleday & Co.

### California Song, by E. M. G.

Come listen, castle-builders, whose hearts are being sold,  
On mammon's brilliant altar for paltry, shining gold;  
Oh! Pause, not thoughtless barter your happiness away,  
By yielding to the tempter of California.

Why wander from the sun-light of fond affection's smile,  
To where no heart-warm greeting the long, long years beguile?  
Why leave a land of plenty, of cheerful industry,  
For the far heartless regions of California?

Gold chills the heart's deep fountain; then wherefore toil for gold,  
And take for gushing sympathy a thing so base and cold?  
Why cast your better feelings so ruthlessly away,  
And toil for sordid gold-dust in California?

Why leave your wives and children, and sunder holy ties:  
Say, will no sad misgivings in their behalf arise?  
O, be content with plenty! Be happy while you may,  
Nor sell your heart's affection in California.

O! can they "love you better," for sordid thirst for gold?  
Nay, Nay! Fond spirits never, for wanton gain are sold;  
A house of peaceful pleasure, where smiles forever play,  
Is worth far more than all the gold in California.

Then pause and think a moment of what you're leaving here,  
Of all the grief and sorrow you'll bring to those so dear;  
Death hovers o'er her border, ambition's victim stay!  
Nor dig for Hope's golden grave in California.

### California Song, by Sarah Fassett

Come all who love to travel, in countries new and old,  
Haste, haste to Sacramento, and fill your bags with gold;  
Oh plod and toil no longer, but hasten on your way,  
You'll surely make your fortune in California.

Come Farmers, dig no longer, for *praties* to eat,  
And sweat and toil forever for a few grains of wheat;  
But take your hoe and knapsack, and travel night and day,  
Until you're fairly planted in California.

Come Loafers, leave your lounging, and doff your dandy airs,  
Don't stop to pay your tailor, or settle small affairs,  
But pack your duds and scatter like bees on summer's day,

You'll surely find the "ready" in California.

Come Merchants, jump your counters, don't stop to measure tape  
And parley for a *sixpence* while *thousands* for you wait;  
But empty all your wheat-sacks, and take them on your way,  
You'll need them all, most surely, in California.

Come Priests, and leave your Bibles, there is no Sabbath there—  
No hour of tedious worship—no time for thought or prayer.  
And Editors, why scribble, and throw your time away?  
When all the world is going to California.

Come Lawyers, let your books rest, and Students do the same,  
You'll need them now no longer to win your wealth and fame;  
And Politicians, you'll discover something to allay  
Your thirst for office-holding in California.

Come Doctors, close your pill-shops, and *all* for *once* agree,  
That digging gold is better than drugging for a fee;  
Your saddle-bags, you'll need them, so throw your stuff away—  
The only fever raging is California.

Come Landlords, don't be idle, you'll have no custom here,  
But take on all your barrels of brandy, wine and beer;  
And don't you know when empty, how nice they'll come in play,  
To pack away your gold in, in California.

Mechanics of all classes, what are you all about?  
Why, haint you heard the rumpus, that all the world is out?  
Come drop your tools and aprons, and start without delay,  
And join the crowd that's going to California.

Come ye, who doubt and linger, while soft eyes on you beam,  
Remember love is lasting, at *least* a golden dream;  
They'll love you all the better, when at some distant day,  
You'll bring them back the *shiners* from California.

It is perhaps poetically unfair to E. M. G. to place her piece in conjunction with Sarah Fasset's, but they were after all published as a pair. E. M. G.'s poem is preachy, with the poet telling the prospective Forty-Niner what he should do, what he ought to feel, suggesting he is selfish and irresponsible, doesn't know what is good for him, and he may die anyway if he goes. The tone of the poem itself becomes another reason to head to California. Fasset's poem is full of verve and is rollicking good fun—she has entered the very mind of those afflicted with gold fever, which simply overwhelms *any* objections. But in reading, one becomes aware of the ridiculous nature of gold fever, and Fasset has crafted a poem which can

also be seen by the thoughtful as providing the real reasons one should not go running off to California.

The poems cited here were all published in the *Rockford Forum* and the *Rockford Free Press* in the 1840s and have been transcribed from microfilm at the Rockford Public Library.

## JANE ADDAMS, PRACTICAL IDEALIST By Sue Crandall

Jane Addams, a native of Cedarville, Illinois, devoted her adult life to working against injustice, unkindness, dirt, disease, intolerance, bigotry, ignorance and war, as well as against greed and dishonesty in public offices. Childhood influences—especially those of her revered father, Hon. John H. Addams—contributed to the essence of those crusades.

Born in Cedarville, Illinois, northwest of Freeport, on September 6, 1860, Jane barely remembered her mother Sarah. She died while on a mission of mercy when Jane was 28 months old. Carrying her ninth child, Sarah went to assist another woman in labor. The exertion proved too much for the 47-year old Sarah. Jane would be motherless for the next six years until her father married Anna Haldeman, a widow with a son, George.

As a child, Jane described herself as ugly and pigeon-toed, with a crooked back which caused her to walk with her head held to one side. She didn't like people to notice her in company with her father because she considered him handsome. She'd avoid walking with him so that he would not be ashamed of his plain child.

Jane Addams counseled "mental integrity above anything else." On one occasion, Jane wanted to wear a lovely cloak to Sunday School, but her father told her it would make other girls feel sad. When she asked why others couldn't have a new cloak, he replied that everyone could be equal in those things that mattered: Education and Religion.

Her father's lessons in tolerance and concern for humanity left a deep impression on young Jane. One of the wealthiest land owners in Stephenson County, John Addams owned a Freeport bank as well as railroads and mills. A visit to the mills gave the introspective and precocious Jane a never-to-be forgotten glimpse into poverty.

Later as a young adult, Jane witnessed the social work of London's Toynbee Hall. Impressed by their compassion, she returned to the United States and founded Chicago's Hull House. As director of this pioneer settlement house she ministered to immigrants in Chicago's west side slums

for 47 years. She worked toward achieving safer conditions in factories, for shorter working hours, and for enforcement of child labor laws. Together with her Rockford friend Julia Lathrop, she interceded to assist young immigrant women who had been forced into white slavery.

This humble woman of courage and insight, who chose to live in the Chicago slums, held only one salaried position: municipal garbage inspector. In recognition of her humanitarian deeds, she received a Nobel Peace Prize. Perhaps her step-brother George described this remarkable woman best. He called her a "practical idealist."



The Cedarville Historical Society is in the 1889 Cedarville school house.  
Source: [www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/cedarville/CedarvilleAreaHS.htm](http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/cedarville/CedarvilleAreaHS.htm)

Editor's note: A museum in a former school house on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street west of Mill Street in Cedarville houses a permanent display honoring Jane Addams. Included are letters, books, clothing and family pictures. Open May – October, Saturdays and Sundays, 1 – 4 p.m. The Cedarville Cemetery on Mill Street is the site of Jane's burial. Visitors may enter the hillside cemetery daily from sunrise to sunset.

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