

Notable and Interesting People in La Crosse's History: 1850 - 1950

(Note: Names are listed in approximate
chronological order in each section)

Native Americans:

Blackhawk: Famous Sauk chief and leader; many of his people were killed or captured at the Bad Axe Massacre in 1832.

Young Swan (Hekh nink ga): Member of Black River band of Ho-Chunk which moved seasonally to the La Crosse area along the river.

Mountain Wolf Woman: Her autobiography, edited by Nancy Lurie, described the life of a Ho-Chunk woman in the early twentieth century.

Decorah Family: In early 1800s, most powerful Ho-Chunk family in Wisconsin. In 1787 Buzzard Decorah led a group that settled near modern La Crosse. His son, One-Eyed Decorah, also called Big Canoe, became chief of the La Crosse tribe. He and his brother, Waukon, helped the Americans in the Black Hawk War of 1832. They went to Washington in 1837 and ceded all Ho-Chunk land east of Mississippi to the U.S.

Grand Excursion

La Crosse 1854 ❖ 2004

Corporal Mitchell Red Cloud: A member of the Ho-Chunk nation and resident Black River Falls; killed in Korean War and was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. A La Crosse park is named for him.

Early Settlers:

Nathan Myrick: First permanent Euro-American settler in Prairie La Crosse; established a trading post in 1841.

Hiram J. B. (Scoots) Miller (1805-1863): Myrick's second partner in 1842. First justice-of-the-peace; hotel owner; postmaster.

Lafayette Bunnell (1824 -1903): Made a claim in La Crosse but settled in Trempealeau. While in the army discovered and named the Yosemite Valley. Served as government agent with the Indians as well as a surgeon. He would assist with risky adventures as well.

Peter Cameron: An early settler and businessman, arrived in 1843.

Emma Cameron: Local beauty and socialite. Early pioneer who came to La Crosse in 1845 and married Peter Cameron and a succession of others.

MASSACRE at BAD AXE

in the Black Hawk War



**Eye-Witness Account by Participants
Compiled and Edited by Crawford B. Thayer**

Blackhawk

Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives

John M. Levy (1820-1910): An Indian agent in La Crosse in and later was a three time mayor of La Crosse; his was the only Jewish family in the community at the time.

Frederica Augusta Levy (1820-1890): La Crosse pioneer (arrived in 1846 with her husband, John) who wrote an important account of the life of early settlers in this area.

Zachariah Moss (1822-1902): African-American, a freed slave, came to La Crosse in 1849 and worked as a barber. His descendents have lived here since then.

Nathan Smith (1820-1905): African-American, ex-slave, early La Crosse Country resident; died in 1905.

Mons Anderson (1830-1905): Norwegian immigrant who arrived in 1851 and became known as the "Merchant Prince of La Crosse"; mentor and advisor for Norwegian immigrants who arrived in the later part of the nineteenth century.

Notorious:

Ma Bennet: The last madam to operate a known brothel in La Crosse; also a well-known benefactor

Frankie La Salle: Ran the largest known brothel in La Crosse; was finally shut down.

William Watts: Murdered David Darst in 1852; escaped twice; sentenced to Waupun for life.

Nathaniel "Scotty" Mitchell: In 1884 emptied his gun into well-liked Frank Burton while a deputy was standing next to him; was arrested immediately; a crowd stormed the jail and lynched him that very night; La Crosse's only hanging.

Media/ Authors:

Mark Kellogg (1833-1876): Arrived in La Crosse in 1851 with his father; telegrapher, photographer, and newspaper writer; died as the only journalist with Custer at Little Big Horn in 1876.

Marcus "Brick" Pomeroy (Born 1833): Became editor of *La Crosse Democrat* in 1860, famous for anti-Lincoln sentiments.

John Ulrich (1828-1906): Arrived in 1856; German born editor of the German language newspaper, *Nord Stern*, published in La Crosse. Popular and well-known, second father to his niece, Mary, who was receiving her schooling in La Crosse (see *River Life*).

Mrs. Henry Espersen (1847-1897): Arrived in 1871; a leading socialite who wrote the social features in the *Daily Press*.

Hamlin Garland (1860-1940): Important American author, born near West Salem. Author of *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891), *Son of the Middle Border*, and *Daughter of the Middle Border* (Pulitzer Prize, 1922), among many other works.



Mary Ulrich 1852-1870
Victim of the War Eagle fire
Courtesy of the LaCrosse County Historical Society

George Edwin Taylor: Editor of the *Wisconsin Labor Advocate* and political leader, active in early 1900s; first African American to run for President of the United States (in 1904 as the National Liberation Party Nominee).

Flora E. Wood Lowry: Educator, poet, and collector/cataloguer of the work of Wisconsin authors in the early 1900s.

Jack Martin: Radio personality in the 1930s and 40s; arrived here with a traveling chautauqua.

Albert H. Sanford (1866-1956): Author of textbooks on American history and government. Published *A History of La Crosse Wisconsin* with H. J. Hirshheimer in 1951.

John Toland: Born in La Crosse in 1921; historian and author, winner of Pulitzer Prize in 1971 for *The Rising Sun*.

River Life:

James Malbon: Civil War artillery veteran and steamboat captain, killed in the explosion of his new steamboat, the *James Malbon* in 1872; buried in Oak Grove Cemetery. Articles about the accident are in the newspaper archives.

Mary Ulrich (1852-1870): Eighteen year old socialite, niece of John Ulrich (see Media). She was returning to her home in Waumundee, WI, for her sister's wedding the evening of May 15, 1870, aboard the steamboat *War Eagle*. When fire broke out, Mary and Felix Spilier jumped from the

deck of the boat, but unfortunately drowned in the Black River. A large funeral service was held in La Crosse. She is buried in Oak Grove Cemetery.

Felix Spiller: African American barber from Cincinnati on the *War Eagle*. John Ulrich entrusted the safety of his niece to Felix to make sure she got off at the correct stop. He drowned, apparently trying to save Mary Ulrich.

George Byron Merrick: Well known source of steamboat information; steamboat pilot on the upper Mississippi; traveled frequently through La Crosse on the *Kate Cassel*, the *Fanny Harris*, and other boats; published a book, *Old Times on the Upper Mississippi*, in 1906; and worked much of his life preserving the memory of steamboat days. His life on the upper river parallels that of Mark Twain on the lower river. He even met Twain in New York City in the 1870's. He was also a Civil War veteran; died in 1931.

Davidson Brothers: William and Peyton, steamboat pioneers; started the first steamboat company in La Crosse in 1862; also operated lumberyards and largest boat building facility north of St. Louis for a while.

Orrin Smith: A famous steamboat captain here and in Galena, Illinois.

W. A. Roosevelt (1833-1894): Arrived in 1853; steamboat engineer who went on to found a plumbing supply company that is still in business.



Marcus "Brick" Pomeroy
Courtesy of the LaCrosse County Historical Society

Civil War Veterans:

Cadwallader Washburn (1818-1882):

Arrived in La Crosse in 1859; Major General in Civil War; congressman; governor of Wisconsin; founder of General Mills; bequeathed money to found a public library in La Crosse.

Capt. Wilson Colwell: Local businessman who was a captain of La Crosse's Light Guard militia; later instrumental in forming La Crosse's Company B of the Iron Brigade which answered Lincoln's first call for soldiers after the firing upon Fort Sumter; killed in Battle of South Mountain in 1862.

James Mellor: 8th Wisconsin Volunteers; died in 1865 after Battle of Nashville.

Edward Cronon: Born in 1836: Arrived in La Crosse in 1855; lost an arm at Battle of Corinth; his letters are available at Murphy Library.

Silas Coster: Twenty-one year old farm boy from New Amsterdam (north of La Crosse); emigrated from Holland in the 1850s; arrived by steamboat from New Orleans having survived a shipwreck in the Bahamas in which his father and several siblings were killed; served with Company B of the famous Iron Brigade in most of the major battles of the Civil War; he is buried at Gettysburg National Cemetery.

William Harries (1843-1921): One of the youngest soldiers of Company B; fought at Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg, among other battles; led home a

group of 20 survivors of the 130 La Crosse area soldiers who enlisted in Company B.

Public Service:

Almanzo Eldred: Arrived in La Crosse in 1850; first sheriff of La Crosse County, in 1852 and 1853.

Timothy Burns (1820-1853): Arrived in 1852; said to be "The Second Founder of La Crosse;" town chairman; first county judge; lieutenant governor of Wisconsin.

Thomas B. Stoddard (1801-1876): Arrived 1852; first La Crosse mayor (1856); state legislator; father of the Southern Minnesota Railroad.

Joseph W. Losey (1843-1928): Arrived in 1856; prominent local attorney, city councilman, known for his city beautification projects in the latter part of the 19th century, including assisting in the city's first modern water system, beautification projects that included roadways, landscapes, and Oak Grove Cemetery. The Losey Memorial Arch was erected in his honor.

Angus Cameron (1824-1897): Arrived in 1857; U. S. senator; state legislator; speaker of the Assembly; judge.

Gysbert Van Steenwyk. (1814-1902): Arrived in 1862; banker; appointed Commissioner of Immigration for Wisconsin in New York City; consul to the Netherlands, Michigan, and Minnesota; state legislator; La Crosse mayor in 1873.



Theodore Rodolf

LA CROSSE.

*Theodore Rodolf
Mayor of La Crosse in 1868*

Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives

Joseph Clarke (1841-1904): Arrived 1866; La Crosse mayor (1880); businessman; started water system.

Captain Charles Miller (Born 1845): Civil War veteran; captain of the "Governor's Guards" (predecessor of the National Guard); saved William Doerflinger's life; inventor; florist.

Dr. Wendell A. Anderson (1840-1928): Arrived in 1866; Civil War surgeon; Consul General to Montreal; started the movement to convert the levee to Riverside Park; La Crosse mayor 1907-1909.

Dr. David Frank (White Beaver) Powell: Lived in La Crosse from 1881 to turn of century. Served four terms as mayor of La Crosse. His friend and business partner was Buffalo Bill Cody.

Col. Orlando Holway (1856-1923): Served in Spanish-American War; became Adjutant General of Wisconsin National Guard.

Leila W. Usher, Harriet Myers, and Jennie Stimble: Organized La Crosse branch of Woman Suffrage Association in 1886.

Mrs. Angus (Mary Baker) Cameron (1835-1907): Founder of La Crosse chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution in 1896, became first DAR National Vice-president General elected from Wisconsin.

Carrie Daniels: One of leaders of La Crosse Equal Suffrage Association (1912).

Helen Dorset (1873-1965): Born in La Crosse; implemented 1920 plan of La Crosse County Council to acquaint women with voting.

Flora E. (Hawkes) Lueck: First woman to serve on La Crosse School Board, appointed in 1920; died in 1956,

Esther Domke (1901-1988): County Clerk from 1927 to 1972, first woman elected to public office.

Eva Wolff: Chair of La Crosse chapter of American Red Cross from 1929-1946, responsible for Red Cross establishing Children's Dental Clinic.

Katherine Lumelsky Feinberg: Aided Jane Addams' Hull House, promoted FDR's National Recovery Programs in La Crosse, campaigned to help Jewish refugees in WW II.

Business/ Industry/ Entrepreneurs:

Simeon Kellogg (1800-1876): Came in 1851 to run one of La Crosse's first hotels (Western Enterprise); chairman of the first school board; postmaster.

A. D. La Due (Born in 1837): Publisher and editor of La Crosse's first newspaper, *Spirit of the Times* (1852); "Father" of the La Crosse and Milwaukee Railroad.

F. M. Rublee: Arrived in La Crosse in 1851; part owner of the first sawmill (1852); lumber baron; city treasurer; died in 1860.

Alexander McMillan (1825-1901): Arrived in 1852; Black River Logging



GEORGE BYRON MERRICK

Steamboat Pilot and Historian
The "Mark Twain" of the Upper Mississippi
1841-1931

Courtesy of the LaCrosse County Historical Society

Company; first log raft to St. Louis; president of the La Crosse Gas Light Company; mayor (1871); banker; president of the La Crosse Temperance League.

Charles L. Colman (1826-1901): Arrived in La Crosse in 1854; lumber baron who built the first La Crosse Shingle Mill (1854); one of the incorporators of the La Crosse Street Railway.

General William W. Crosby (1818-1892): Arrived in 1854; lumber baron; first U.S. assessor for the La Crosse area; raised the 2nd militia company, which became La Crosse's Company B during the Civil War.

A. W. Pettibone (1826-1915): Arrived in 1854; lumber baron, mayor during the Civil War, donated Baron Island to La Crosse.

Gideon Hixon (1826-1892): Arrived in 1856; wealthy La Crosse lumberman who died in 1892; banker and state senator; his home is now a museum operated by the La Crosse County Historical Society.

Duncan D. McMillan (1837-1908): Arrived in 1856; lumberman; lawyer; president of State Bank; councilman.

Albert Hirshheimer (1840-1924): Arrived in 1856; founder of the La Crosse Plow Company in 1865; paid for the city's first public wells.

Abner Gile (1820-1897): Settled north of Onalaska in 1856; lumber baron; started a linseed oil mill.

W. R. Sill (1822-1901): Arrived in 1856 as a civil engineer in charge of designing the Milwaukee Railroad; laid out most of North La Crosse; responsible for the design of the plank road that eventually became the Causeway; lumber baron.

J.J. Hogan (1837-1914): Arrived in 1857; pioneer wholesale grocer; mayor (1876); state assemblyman.

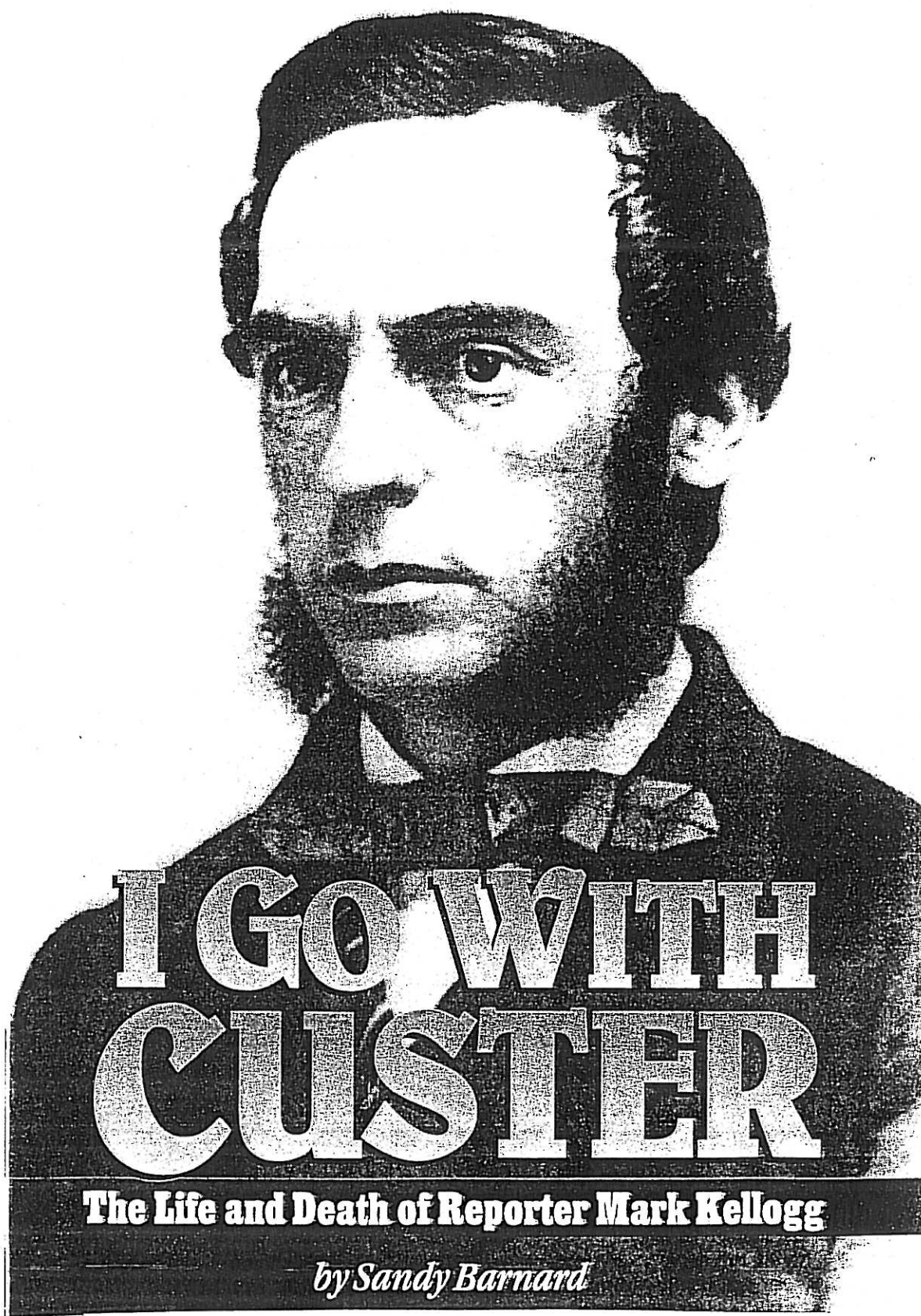
Deacon Samuel T. Smith (1801-1890): Owned and operated the first temperance steamboat on the Upper Mississippi; organized the Baptist church in La Crosse; started what would become Oak Grove Cemetery.

John Gund (1830-1910): Arrived in 1854; German immigrant who established City Brewery with Gottlieb Heileman, later breaking off to form his own Gund Brewery.

Gottlieb Heileman (1824-1878): Arrived in 1857; founder with John Gund of City Brewery. The G. Heileman Brewing Company was one of the few to survive prohibition and went on to become the fourth largest brewery in the United States.

Johanna Heileman (1832-1917): Operated G. Heileman Brewing Company after her husband's death in 1878; one of first women to be president of a corporation in the United States

Charles (1826-1904) and John Michel (1831-1910): Brick masons who founded the C. and J. Michel Brewing Company in 1857.



Mark Kellogg
Newspaper Reporter who rode with Custer at the Little Big Horn.

Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives

Techtor Coster (1842-1933): Brother of Silas (see Civil War); railroad man for many years; operated the first steam railroad engine in La Crosse in 1858.

John Paul (1831-1909): A resilient lumber baron in the 1860s (he was burned out at least three times); banker.

William Listman (1830-1919): Arrived in 1858; started flour mills in La Crosse (1879) and Superior.

John S. Medary (1839-1909): Arrived in 1860; owned tanning and saddle companies; active in La Crosse Manufacturers' and Jobbers' Union (1886).

Col. Theodore Rodolf (1815-1892): Arrived in 1863 as first government land agent in the area; published local paper, the *National Democrat*; mayor (1868); state assemblyman.

Rev. John A. Salzer (1823-1892): Arrived in La Crosse in 1863 as a Methodist preacher; left ministry and built the largest mail-order seed business in America.

James Trane (1857-1936): Arrived in 1865; founded Trane Company and originated vapor heating system with his son, Reuben.

Col. Frederick Allen Copeland (1846-1926): Arrived in 1868; lumberman; started electric light plant; banker, Inspector General of Wisconsin National Guard; mayor 1891-1893; benefactor.

William Doerflinger (1857-1926): Well-known and well-liked local merchant

who was known for his fairness with employees and customers alike.

L. F. Eastos (1859-1947): Original park commissioner for 39 years; 27 year member of the Board of Education.

Robert Calvert (1830-1910): Arrived in 1869; Canadian hero of the Finian Invasion; as the Board of Trade accountant, created an invaluable record of La Crosse's industrial history.

Thomas H. Spence (1851-1929): Arrived in 1871; creator of a large wholesale pharmacy supply (Spence-McCord); served as president of the newly created State Board of Pharmacy.

W. W. Cargill (1844-1909): Arrived in 1875; built the largest grainery business in the country; generous, anonymous philanthropist; Cargill is still the largest privately owned business in the country.

John Pamperin (Died in 1907): Founder of Pamperin Cigar Company, a prominent La Crosse business in the late 1800s.

William F. (Buffalo Bill) Cody: Owned land in La Crosse and was a business partner of Dr. Frank (White Beaver) Powell.

Ellen Myers: First recorded female photographer in La Crosse, specializing in enlarging and portrait work (1875 - 1890s).

Ruth Johnson Maurer: Incorporated the Marinello Company in 1905, manufacturer of beauty products



The Leona
TRADE MARK

*Leona Foerster Linker
Pioneer La Crosse Businesswoman*

Courtesy Murphy Library – UW La Crosse

which were sold world wide; also established beauty training schools to teach proper use of her products.

Leona Foerster Linker: Formed Leona Garment Company in 1905 to manufacture an undergarment that combined camisole, underpants, and slip.

Reuben Trane (1886-1936): Incorporated the Trane Company with his father, James, in 1913; was instrumental in the development of many products sold by the company; a member of the Wisconsin Business Hall of Fame.

Helen Mae Hoeft: National reputation as "queen of photofinishing" as a partner in Ray's Photo Service (1924-1955).

Healers and Helpers

Dr. Mary E. Parker Finney Lottridge (1826-1906): First woman with a medical degree and license to practice in the Midwest. A resident of West Salem, she opened a medical office in La Crosse in 1855; one of four women doctors in the nation at that time.

Dr. Elizabeth Comstock: An early Trempealeau County doctor; among Wisconsin's earliest female doctors.

Drs. George E. (1848-1920) and William A. Powell: Like their more famous brother, "White Beaver" Powell, these local doctors incorporated Indian medicine and other techniques. Both arrived in 1881.

Dr. Ezekial Swarthout (Born in 1855) and daughters, Susan and Edyth: Ezekial

practiced medicine in the late 1800s. His daughter, Edyth, was among the state's earliest female doctors. Susan was trained as a pharmacist, although she never practiced.

Mary Friedrich Gerrard (1850-1915): Midwife from 1878 - 1913.

Dr. Adolf Gundersen (1865-1938): A Norwegian immigrant who arrived in La Crosse in 1891 at the age of 26; founding member and first medical director of Lutheran Hospital in 1902; along with his sons, founded Gundersen Clinic in the late 1920s; was made a Knight of the First Class, Order of St. Olaf in 1926.

Shegetaro Morikubo: A Japanese chiropractor in La Crosse in the early 1900's; the local medical establishment tried to keep him from practicing.

Anita Gunlach: First permanent Wisconsin Extension home economist in La Crosse County (1936).

Ella C. Ingwersen: Superintendent of La Crosse Hospital 1901-1942, dedicated to serving "poor and rich alike."

Augusta DeFlorin (1895-1980): Public Health nurse for La Crosse 1926-1964; quarantined homes to control diseases such as whooping cough, measles, scarlet fever, mumps, and chicken pox.

Helen Hanson (Born in 1906): La Crosse County nurse 1934 -1971; worked to combat tuberculosis, to provide



*George C. Poage
African American Olympic Medalist in Track*

Courtesy Murphy Library – UW La Crosse

dental care, eye glasses; and was in charge of the immunization program.

Dr. Lillian B. Tracey: Practiced medicine from 1929 - 1973, promoting birth control, care of elderly and handicapped, and control of alcohol abuse; opened a birth control clinic in 1930s.

Sports:

George C. Poage: La Crosse High School graduate; track star; first African-American Olympic medalist (in 1904).

Roy L. Patterson: Played for Chicago White Sox 1901-1907; winning pitcher in the first American League game on April 24, 1901.

Edward Konetchy: Major-league baseball player 1907-1921 for the St. Louis Cardinals, Pittsburgh Pirates, Boston Braves, Brooklyn Dodgers, Philadelphia Phillies.

Educators:

Rose Keefe: Established Miss Keefe's School of Shorthand in 1890s, one of the earliest vocational schools in La Crosse.

Sister Seraphine Kraus (1854-1954): Directress of schools served by Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in late 19th century. Established St. Rose Normal Institute to train teachers.

Harry Spence (1871-1956): La Crosse High School teacher who became its first

official football coach. A La Crosse school is named for him.

Hazel Brown Leicht: La Crosse County superintendent of schools from 1937 to 1962; presided over consolidation of rural schools into school districts with high schools.

Josephine Hintgen (1892-1981): Educator and guidance counselor in La Crosse from 1920 - 1957; initiated first guidance program in La Crosse; nationally prominent in guidance.

Mauree Applegate Clack (1897-1969): Professor of education, nationally known speaker, author of eight books in the field of children's literature. Her radio program "Let's Write" was broadcast from Madison to rural schools.

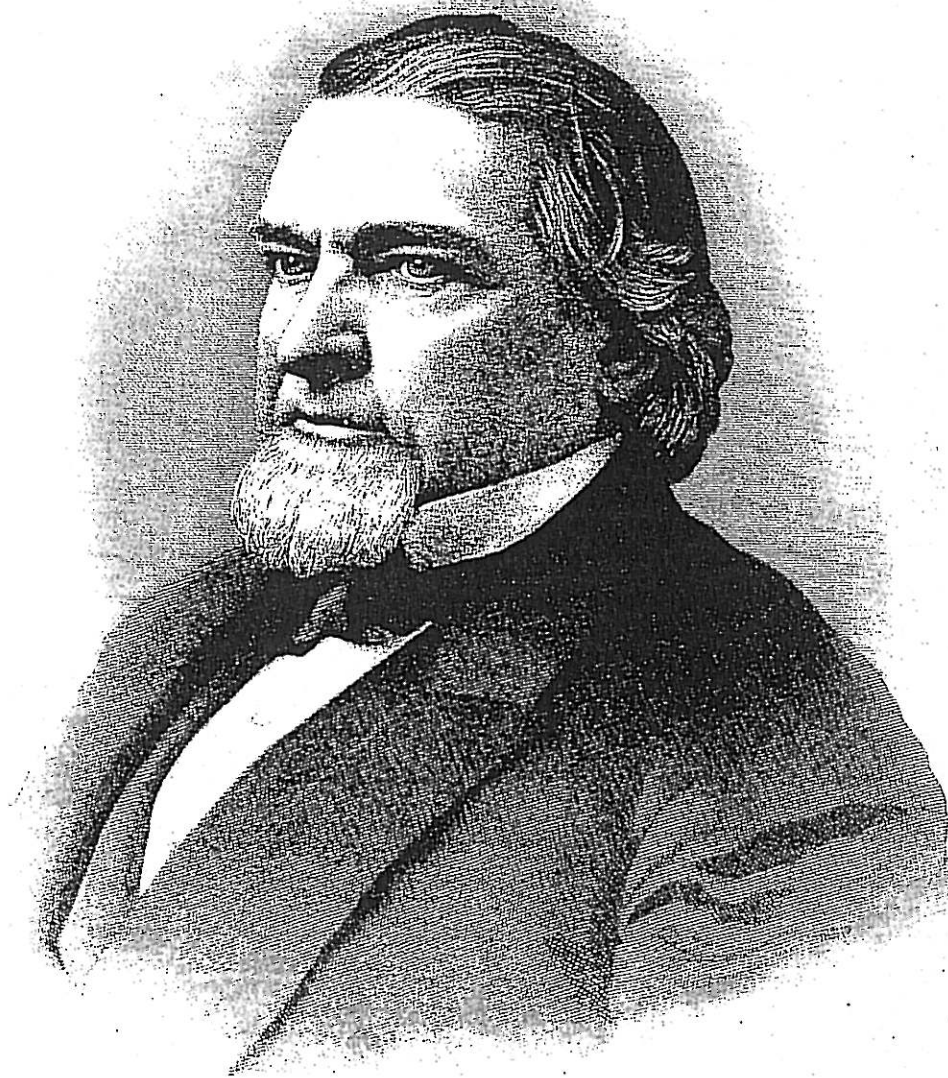
Alice Drake: Teacher trainer at La Crosse State Teachers College, 1931 - 1965.

Nida Saunders: Developed and taught in public school program to teach deaf children from 1946 to 1961; did not believe in teaching sign language.

Services:

Sister Ludavica (1844-1929): Arrived in 1872; founded local chapter of Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration.

Annie E. Hanscome: La Crosse's only librarian from 1874 to 1904, first for Young Men's Library Association and then for La Crosse Public Library when it opened in 1888.



*Cadwallader C. Washburn
Civil War General and Governor of Wisconsin who
bequeathed money to found the public library in La Crosse.*

Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives

C. C. Washburn

Reverend Nellie Mann Opdale: Minister of St. Paul's Universalist Church from 1898 to 1902. Previously she had been on the lecture circuit advocating woman suffrage.

Dorothy Waite: Social worker who succeeded in convincing La Crosse County Board to place neglected and delinquent children in a home instead of a hospital or jail; due to her efforts, the first child was admitted to La Crosse County Juvenile Detention Home in 1929.

Community and Culture:

Elsie Gile Scott (1845-1928): Arrived in 1864 with her father, La Crosse pioneer and lumberman, Abner Gile; well known socialite who would put on lavish parties.

Ellen Pennell Hixon (1837-1913): Arrived in 1856 with her husband, Gideon Hixon; instrumental in preventing Grandd Bluff from being destroyed by quarrying in 1909, founded La Crosse Home for the Friendless (now Family and Children's Center), helped found La Crosse Hospital, first president of League of Women Voters in La Crosse (1924).

Helga Gundersen (1867-1951): In 1899 formed Ibsen Club dedicated to reading of Norwegian literature, and went on to be active in relief efforts during World War II, Honorary Wisconsin Mother for 1950.

Mrs. Arthur Esperson: In 1912 formed the La Crosse Music Study Club for married women.

Mark Tobey: Abstract Expressionist painter, born in Centerville in 1890; first American artist to have a solo exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décoratif in Paris.

Carl Rau: La Crosse art photographer, contemporary of Alfred Stieglitz (1854-1946).

Mrs. T. H. Brindley: First president of American Association of University Women in 1922 (known as the College Club until 1930).

Lottie Beckett Spence (1876-1959): Wisconsin Mother of 1950; pioneer in Boy Scout movement in La Crosse; President of YWCA; one of founding members of League of Women Voters in La Crosse (1924).

Mrs. F. A. Douglas: First president of La Crosse Community Concert Association (1932-33).

Mrs. Ernest Smith: Organized Campus Dames in 1925 "to promote literary and social interests of faculty wives" and support student life on campus of La Crosse Normal School.

Julie Haydon: Actress on stage and screen in 1930's and 1940's; played Laura in world premiere of The Glass Menagerie.

Joseph Losey (1909-1984): Movie director, born in La Crosse.

Katherine Martindale (1890-1977): Environmentalist; won conservation award for preservation of area wild flowers and for aiding in establishing the Midway Prairie Scientific Area;

successful in having her home listed
on National Register for Historic
Places.

(Many of the women's names are taken from
*For the Common Good: A History of
Women's Roles in La Crosse County,
1920-1980* by Margaret Larson)

This sample report is provided as a model for students interested in further researching notable and interesting people who helped shape our local history.

- Ed. For the Grand Excursion Educate Committee

Ruth Maurer and the Marinello Company;

A Woman Entrepreneur in a "Man's" World

Big Idea, Small Start

In 1903, in the basement of a red brick house at 631 State Street, Ruth Maurer would make batches of facial cream and powders using a double boiler heated by a gas jet. Although the quantities were small, Mrs. Maurer felt the business potential in manufacturing and selling cosmetic products to women was great. At that time, most "beauty aides" for women were of the homemade variety...oils, waxes, cypress berries and even incense. She was sure a market existed for retail cosmetics.

Ruth Maurer needed an infusion of capital to get her idea off the ground and turned to her husband, Albert A. Maurer, a La Crosse physician. Dr. Maurer was skeptical of his wife's plan but offered \$300 despite his doubts. He told her she was throwing away the \$300 on a "fool idea," and hoped that she would drop the whole plan after what he thought would be an inevitable failure.

Ruth Maurer's initial attempt at selling her cosmetics through the mail brought in \$30 in sales in one day. She quickly deposited the earnings in the bank and began reinvesting the profits back into her little enterprise.

The Right People, the Right Idea

Ruth Maurer was not alone in her burgeoning venture. Chemist Carl F. Runckel, who operated a drug store with his brother Louis at 124 S. 5th Avenue, assisted Mrs. Maurer in developing the formulas for her creams and lotions. Harriet Chamberlain, who later married E.W. Loose, kept the books for Mrs. Maurer from the beginning and had a keen sense for running a successful business. She became manager of Maurer's company during the height of its operation in La Crosse.

By 1912 the business had outgrown the Maurer home and Ruth Maurer moved the operation to 209 S. 5th Ave. She called her business the Marinello Company; but how she arrived at that name is unknown. What is known is that Maurer's idea for a retail cosmetics business was proving to be visionary, and in 1913 the Marinello Co. first appeared in the La Crosse city directory with "R.J. Maurer" listed as the president.

Perseverance and Rapid Growth.

About the same time the Marinello Co. moved to its new location, Maurer rented space at 127 S. 6th Street to establish her own printing plant where she would create thousands of flyers and brochures promoting her products. She also employed a crew of salesmen who sold Marinello products to drug stores and department stores throughout the country. The combination of aggressive advertising and sales led to rapid growth of the company and it soon became apparent that a new, larger location was needed. Ruth Maurer approached several

influential citizens of La Crosse as well as the Chamber of Commerce, to seek local capital for her expansion plans. Despite having an obviously very successful business, she was turned down by the local captains of industry. Undaunted, she went ahead on her own and bought the former home of La Crosse lumber and steamboat magnet P.S. Davidson at 225 S. 6th Street in about 1920, remodeled it, and built a large addition on the east side of the building. (This building was razed in 1965).

At about the same time she was acquiring a new location for her company, Ruth Maurer conceived a brilliant marketing strategy of opening a line of beauty training schools in which women would be trained to operate beauty parlors using the Marinello line of products exclusively. By the 1920s, her products were being sold all over the world.

Big Promises From Out East

By 1925 the Marinello Co. employed 150 people and had annual sales of \$3,000,000, equivalent to \$34.4 million in today's money. Several decades ahead of her time, Ruth Maurer provided her employees with a recreational clubhouse and free medical services courtesy of her physician husband. The success of the company soon attracted the attention of a group of New York businessmen. They bombarded Ruth Maurer with promises of unlimited resources and opportunities if she would move her business to New York. She succumbed to their sales pitch and moved the company to New York sometime around 1925 or 1926. Not only did a lot of La Crosse people lose their jobs but Ruth Maurer was eventually forced out of her own business with a \$30,000 buy-out. The cosmetic manufacturing line of Marinello eventually

faded from existence but the Marinello Beauty Schools are still in business. Ruth Maurer died in New York on December 2, 1945, at the age of 74.

By Bill Petersen

Sources

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