

A member of the Methodist Episcopal church, she carries her religion into her daily life. Always broadly charitable, ready to help with service or money when the need arose, she is beloved by a large circle of friends, and through her services to her country, her name is written on the pages of American history.

SUSAN BENDER McFARLAND

Author—Mabel Gottschalk

Wisconsin Rapids

Among the pioneer women of Wisconsin Rapids is numbered Susan Bender McFarland, a descendant of John Cook who served as Lieutenant and Quarter Master in a Rhode Island regiment in the Revolutionary war and Thankful Trip Cook. She was born in Sullivan, New York, September 15, 1852, a daughter of Abraham and Permelia Cook Bender who moved with their family westward in the spring of 1855. At a Buffalo hotel the father had to stay awake all night to save himself from being robbed. They stopped for a time at Marengo, Illinois, then in the fall of same year moved with two covered wagons, one drawn by a fine team of horses and one by a pair of oxen. At Portage the horses were sold for a heifer, a cow, two oxen and three hundred dollars and the trip resumed by ox team to Plainfield. The family arrived with plenty of money, but Mrs. McFarland related experiences when it was of little value as at times food and clothing could not be procured. Neighbors had to be saving with what they had for fear of running short before another harvest.

At one time Mrs. McFarland's father had to journey to Portage for flour and the mother ground corn meal with a coffee mill to make bread for the family and when the father returned, though late at night, she made biscuits and awakened the children to enjoy the feast.

The Bender family were devout Methodists and every Sunday drove six miles to the nearest church in a lumber wagon drawn by oxen. The children were educated in a pioneer school house built of slabs, furnished with slab benches. As soon as the road was built through to Centralia, now Wisconsin Rapids, Mr. Bender did some of his trading there, bringing his daughter Susan with him on many trips; Susan often remained for an extended visit at the home of her sister Jane, the wife of P. J. Johnson, who owned and operated a sawmill eight miles north of Centralia. It was on one of these visits that she met Rufus McFarland who was buying shingles and lumber to transport by raft to St. Louis and other southern cities.

Susan Bender and Rufus McFarland commonly known as Centralia's Poet Laureate were married February 1, 1874, at the home of the bride's brother, B. F. Bender, in Centralia, by Rev. Jesse Cole, pastor of the M. E. Church. They boarded for a time but moved into their new home before the doors were hung or windows placed. The home still stands and is one of the landmarks of the city, located just south of the Lowell School, but has been remodeled into a comfortable and modern dwelling.

When first built the land around it was used as camping ground by the Indians, who often kept up their whooping and savage yells the whole night through. The house was surrounded by a dense woods, filled with bears, wolves and other wild animals.

Mrs. McFarland was one of the few women who rode the rapids of the Wisconsin River on a raft; her husband being a pioneer riverman. Besides lumbering he later became interested in real estate and the cultivation of cranberries.

Having attended the Cook Family Reunion in New York in 1906, Mrs. McFarland kept urging that a Wisconsin Branch be formed with the result that in 1921 such organization was perfected.

For many years as a practical nurse she ministered to the ills of many friends and neighbors and through-

out her lifetime in Wisconsin Rapids took an active part in social and religious activities.

Having lived in or near Wisconsin Rapids for sixty eight years Mrs. McFarland became very well known and took a prominent part in all Old Settlers' activities; for nearly forty years was an active member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and also belonged to and worked faithfully in the Ladies Aid Society, the Missionary Society, the Rainbow Chapter No. 87, O. E. S., holding all the important offices, and of the Adawagam Chapter D. A. R., of which she served as Chaplain.

In the spring of 1922 following attacks of tonsillitis and neuritis, Mrs. McFarland's heart became affected and though competent physicians tried to cure, dropsy set in and she was called suddenly to the World Beyond, January 2, 1924. She had lived as she wished fairly active to the end. Her husband's death occurred July 3, 1912.

Mrs. McFarland was the mother of five children, the first three dying in early childhood, the fourth is Mabel, the wife of A. F. Gottschalk, a prominent merchant and real estate man of Wisconsin Rapids. The fifth child is Robert Ernest, who makes his home with his wife in Chicago, and Newark, New Jersey, where he is employed by the Western Electric Company.

There are also three grand children, Robert, Edith and Jerry Gottschalk.

In pioneer days Mrs. McFarland endured many hardships but endured them all with fortitude and cheerful spirits, looking forward to better times in the future, which she had the happiness to see and has effectively done her own part of the work which has developed the community where she lived into what it is today. The dearest memories and interests in her life were centered in the city and county in which she lived. The memory of Mrs. McFarland as an ideal woman highly respected and greatly beloved will live long in the community.