

HARRIET DEAN STERLING

Contributed by the John Bell Chapter, D. A. R.

Mrs. Harriet Dean Sterling came to Madison, Wisconsin from Raynham, Massachusetts, in 1849, at which time she was entertained at the historic Fairchild home, then as now, far famed for its hospitality.

Here she met Prof. John N. Sterling, "Father of the University", whom she married in 1851.

Mrs. Sterling was educated at South Bridgewater Normal school and Wheaton Seminary, Norton, Massachusetts, and taught for a few years at Bridgewater, and Newark, N. J.

Her life in Wisconsin was one of extreme devotion to the interests of the University and its students.

It was she, of whom one of the members of the class of 1873, who was close to the family life of Prof. and Mrs. Sterling, wrote at the time of her death: "My thought in all my remembrance of Mrs. Sterling since those dear University days, is the thought of an impersonated Alma Mater, a fostering, cherishing genius of the University as a whole and of its students, both men and women, individually. She was a mother to the whole great literary commonwealth. . . . The true secret of that blessedly maternal sway which Mrs. Sterling exercised lay deep down in the kindly loving heart, where the spirit of all motherhood had its fount.

Mrs. Sterling was a woman of affairs. Her judgment was excellent and her demeanor always self-controlled calm. In her, there was a power behind the throne whose and wise counsels often went through as an influence into the meetings where only men assembled and the University is the richer by reason of those counsels today.

Senator Wm. F. Vilas of the class of 1858 wrote of her:

"Mrs. Sterling may fairly be called the Mother of the University. She was the first woman in the faculty; for, as help-meet to the dearly beloved Prof. John of the old boys, she was truly of the faculty that governed, and was paid student worship, though not instructing. Always, during all the dark days—and for years but rarely and briefly the sun broke through—the good professor and this excellent woman, his wife, were the strong stays and examples of courage, devotion, serene constancy and good promise."

In the early days of the University, the families of the three professors lived in the old south dormitory, now known as South Hall. They occupied apartments in the three upper stories, respectively. The arrangement was that they should have a dining room in common on the first floor, and that the wives of the professors should take turns in managing the boarding department. As it turned out, however, it all devolved upon Mrs. Sterling and for several years she managed and presided over the community dining room.

The students of those early days, when faculty and students came into such close contact, were dear to her heart and "her sympathy, motherly nature, bright active mind, buoyant spirit and fun-loving disposition won her a warm place in the hearts of the students. One in speaking of her sayings: "I can never forget how much the classes of '63 and '64 adored Mrs. Sterling.' Her whole heart and mind were centered on the University and its students. Young men of scant means were boarded in her family for a meagre sum or were given their meals, and her sympathy and help went out to all in need of them."

Notwithstanding her devotion to the University and the students and the time it demanded of her, she never neglected her family, but was a devoted mother.

She had eight children, five of whom died in infancy, three survive her.

Mrs. Sterling was a staunch Presbyterian, one of the charter members of Christ Presbyterian Church,

Madison, of which she was always a faithful and enthusiastic member. At the time of her death she was one of the vice-presidents of the Woman's Presbyterian Board of Missions of the Northwest. She was interested in all good causes, was an officer in the temperance organization of early days in Madison, was also one of the ladies of the town who established the Woman's Exchange and was an officer in it.

Mrs. Sterling passed away on July 11, 1900, having just passed her 76th birthday. Her happy, cheery disposition showed itself to the last. She was most patient and serene during the year and a half of invalidism induced by a stroke of paralysis that preceded her death.

Almost her last words were: "I am so thankful."

Written by her daughter, Miss Susan A. Sterling.

FRANCES CONKEY FETHERS, 1847-1917

Author—Julia L. Lovejoy

Frances Ella Conkey was born in Antwerp, New York, where she lived until the family moved to Canton in 1865.

She was descended from Elder Wm. Brewster who came over in the Mayflower, and was ruling elder in the church of Plymouth Colony.

Her revolutionary ancestor was Jonas Conkey, who served as private several months in 1775 and as Sergant in 1777 when his regiment marched to reinforce General Gates, commander of the northern army.

Her father, Jonas S. Conkey was a beloved physician of Antwerp and Canton. Her mother, Mary Frances Paige Conkey, was a gentle and cultured woman.

Mrs. Fethers attended a young ladies' school at Claverack, New York, until she graduated. There she studied music and later she pursued her musical studies in New York City.