



## Gratia A. Countryman and Family Papers.

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MARIA L. SANFORD

She was called the best loved woman of Minnesota. Men respected her courage and integrity; women loved her gentle spirit and ready sympathy. Every one admired and enjoyed her keen intellect and her delicious sense of humor. Our memory of her today is vivid.

Miss Sanford came to Minnesota in 1880. She had been for eleven years Professor of History in Swarthmore College, the first woman professor in the United States. Dr. Folwell had visited <sup>her</sup> the classroom of this ~~enthusiastic teacher~~ and had recognized her unusual qualities. Later he invited her to the University of Minnesota as Professor of Rhetoric and Elocution. This position she held for twenty-nine years, until the day of her retirement. She was a <sup>loving</sup> ~~born~~ teacher and always gave the best there was in her. She had a fixed belief that education should prepare one for living; that it should be as much concerned with character as culture. <sup>And in that belief she taught</sup>

She had a remarkable personality of vitality and vigor, a voice of rare purity and power, and a remarkable memory, especially for poetry. ~~Her mind was stored with it.~~ When she chose to spend the class hour repeating poem after poem in her musical voice it awakened in students their latent appreciation not only of poetry but of things high and noble. It was the genius of a great teacher that she could awaken and inspire her students.

Her marvellous voice was a great asset. All of her force, her earnestness, her humor penetrated to her audience through the thrilling sweetness and power of her voice. <sup>During her whole career</sup> She was in great demand as a speaker, and accepted lecture engagements throughout the State. She was a University Extension Department in her own person and doubtless contributed much to the phenomenal growth of the University in the 80's and 90's. This enlargement of her sphere of teaching carried her influence far and wide. To do it she had to endure hardship and fatigue. But that was another of her



outstanding characteristics, ~~that~~ she never counted the cost to herself.

Her students always found her ready to devote time and training, <sup>early and late</sup> at whatever self-sacrifice of personal plans or needed rest. [So selfish we were of her and so generous she was to us. Her abundant reward was <sup>accrued to her</sup> in our successes.]

In 1909, she retired at the age of seventy-two. The senior class of that year invited her to give the commencement address which she felt was the greatest honor ever shown her. [It was said to be the first time a woman had ever been asked to make such an address in a great University.] ~~It was a great event and a memorable address, entitled, What the University can do for the State.~~ <sup>At this time</sup> The Alumni Association <sup>expressing their deep gratitude to her</sup> presented her with a document beginning, "We, the alumni of the University, thank you for what you have been to your students. ... twenty-nine classes acknowledge with gratitude their debt to your kindness and wisdom, etc." The Board of Regents voted her Emeritus Professor of Rhetoric. And so closed her active career as a University professor.

But such a woman could not be laid on the shelf. Her wide acquaintance through the State and nation made her in constant demand as a speaker. She was interested in civic matters and national problems, and promoted them with her wonderful vitality of mind and body. President Vincent described her as

"a woman who had retired and didn't know it."

On her eightieth birthday in 1916 the University celebrated the occasion by an all University Convocation. At this time Oscar Firkins <sup>who has been in her department for many years</sup> recited an original poem to which Miss Sanford listened with unrestrained mirth. We are quoting one stanza:



"What name, said you? No, not "Mary,"

Debonair, sedate, and chary,

Not "Marie," demure and wary,

Fits the presence I acclaim;

No, the thing I chant is bigger,

It is impetus and vigor,

Truculence it is and rigor,

It's a crisp and couchant trigger,

And "Maria" is its name."

*later*  
Mr. Firkins wrote a very remarkable summary of her with his usual fine insight: *all of which I must to read*

"Maria L. Sanford, who was a learner and a teacher in America for eighty years had a temperament the precise opposite of all that one would naturally associate with learnership and teachership in that time and in that country. She had a jubilant, dominant, turbulent spirit, fitted to guide a crusade or head an insurrection, about as circumspect as a projectile and about as tamable as a prairie fire; a poet could have pictured her as joining the dance of the Maenads on Mount Cithaeron or the descent of the dauntless Valkyrie from the clouds to the corpse-strewn battlefield.

"A nature of this mould was born in Connecticut in 1836, born to poverty, to work, to family prayers, to austere manners, to a puritanic and inexorable code, born, finally, to sixty years of subjection to a teacher's routine and a teacher's decorum in the exacting and censorious America of her day. What was the result? This woman embraced her limitations, turned restraint into opportunity, made wings out of her fetters, found escape and room for her swift and daring spirit in those very elements of her destiny in which others of the same breed would have seen only handicap and bondage. In a college faculty she was almost the



most orthodox member, and she was absolutely the most riotous. She would have made the welkin ring with the vehemence of her exhortations to a disaffected populace to keep the peace.

"The strongest proof of the indomitable vigor of the woman came in the last years of her life, the period of nominal retirement. She was known at that time, if not to the nation, at least to a class in every district of the nation. She was fêted, fondled, flattered, fed with confections and pelted with nosegays by school-children, Sunday-school classes, teachers' clubs, women's clubs, daughters of the revolution, and one knows not what. By all this she was comforted, but not subdued; the blast, the flame, which constituted her being was unchecked. The falchion which she essentially was showed its undimmed and undulled edge beneath the vain accumulation of sweetmeats, sedatives, and flowers."

Her last days were as she would have had them. Invited to <sup>address</sup> attend the National Convention of the Daughters of the American Revolution at Washington in April, 1920, she delivered a powerful address, An Apostrophe to the Flag. A frail little figure on the platform, her clear ringing voice pealed out over the great audience as it always had. She was giving her valedictory. That night the glorious voice was stilled.

In June the University held a Memorial Convocation in her honor.

Today we again honor her as one of the Builders of the Name. She still lives,

"The best loved woman of the North Star State."



## MARIA

What name, said you? No, not "Mary,"  
Debonair, sedate, and chary,  
Not "Marie," demure and wary,

✓ Fits the presence I acclaim:  
No, the thing I chant is bigger,  
It is impetus and vigor,  
Truculence it is and rigor,  
It's a crisp and couchant trigger,  
And "Maria" is its name.

She's no April, self-beguiled,  
With a dimmed and dropping eyelid,  
Nor a May, by zephyrs shy led,

To some brook's enameled play:  
She is winter, lusty, stinging,  
Winter martial, cordial, ringing,  
Fire-glow with frost-gleam bringing,  
All the geese, affrighted, winging  
From its presence far away.

Of reforms she keeps the tally;  
When the civic virtues rally,  
Leads the cry and heads the sally,  
With her besom sweeps the alley,  
And the handle of the same  
As a club she stoutly uses,  
Stroke for stroke she ne'er refuses,  
Satan, when he counts his bruises,  
Pours confusion on her name.

On through hootings and applauses  
She can steer her drove of causes,  
Propaganda fierce as Shaw's is  
Crashes through the crepes and gauzes  
Raised to screen the bar or slum;  
If reform of vigor short is,  
She injects the aqua fortis,  
Egging on to speedier sorties  
The millennium, that tortoise,  
And that creeper, Kingdom Come.

✓ Quaking beam and trembling rafter  
Knew her hurricane of laughter,  
Strong to lift and buoy and waft her  
To some far-off land of mirth;  
And we guessed she had been tippling  
On that liquor blithely rippling,  
That intoxicant called Kipling,  
When the thunder-peal had birth.



At her word, compelling fiat  
Tumult shuddered into quiet,  
Despotism fringed with riot

Stamped the sway Maria bore;  
Did some student, bold of feature,  
Strive to challenge or impeach her,  
Override or overreach her,  
Debris from that hapless creature  
Made mosaic of the floor.

When from sharp examination  
Back came themelet or oration  
His own son--in that mutation--

Scarce the student parent knew;  
Back it came with strange injections,  
Drawn and quartered, slit in sections;  
Hintings at august perfections,  
Charities iced with corrections,  
At his head Maria threw.

"Shall" and "Will," from mixed embraces,  
Scudded to their lawful places,  
Pronouns rummaged for their cases,  
Mincing airs and mawkish graces  
Vanished to some kindlier shore;  
How the air grew calorific,  
When she thundered "Be specific!  
Prune it! Write hieroglyphic,  
When you're mummies--not before!"

Let the years heap up their snowballs;  
They are gossamers and blowballs;  
Charon mourns his stinted obols,  
Time bewails his unpaid score;  
Hers were sixties hale as Goethe's,  
Romping seventies whose fate is  
On into the madcap eighties  
Fearless and uncurbed to pour.

Praise her not with smug obeisance,  
Sleek and millinered complaisance!  
Save your peppermints and raisins  
For the dupe of sugared lies!  
Praise her, travel-soiled and dusty,  
Praise her, vehement and gusty,  
Praise her, kinked and knurled and crusty,  
Leonine and hale and lusty,  
Praise her, oaken-ribbed and trusty,  
Shout "Maria" to the skies.



## MARIA L. SANFORD

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
GENERAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION  
MINNEAPOLIS

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

February 9, 1933

Miss Gratia Countryman  
Public Library  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

My dear Miss Countryman:

A special convocation in honor of Miss Sanford was held not on her seventieth birthday, but on her eightieth, Tuesday, December 19, 1916, in the University Armory. That was the time when talks were made by Professor Hutchinson, LeRoy Arnold, yourself, Oscar Firkins, and Cyrus Northrop.

It is a little more difficult to be absolutely certain about the date on which Mr. Firkins first assisted in the Department of Rhetoric. I have looked through the catalogues, but his name does not appear until 1891. The University Dictionary states that he was assistant in Rhetoric in 1891 and continued from that time on. Perhaps that date should be used. He was graduated in 1884 and received his M.A. in 1888. I have a feeling that he might have been a scholar in the department while working for his master's degree, but there is no record of that in the catalogues. 1891 was the first date according to the records.

Very cordially yours,

*E. B. Pierce*

Chairman, Committee on University Functions

EBP/F



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
GENERAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION  
MINNEAPOLIS

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

February 4, 1933

Miss Gratia Countryman  
Public Library  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

My dear Miss Countryman:

Confirming our telephone conversation, let me say that the University is planning to hold a convocation on February 16, at 11:30, in the Northrop Memorial Auditorium, in honor of the "Builders of the Name", those whose rare administrative or teaching ability, scientific or scholastic achievement, or inspirational leadership within the institution itself has brought honor and distinction to the University.

These "builders" are William Watts Folwell, Cyrus Northrop, Henry T. Eddy, William S. Pattee, and Maria Sanford. *Let to speak for her.*

Five persons are asked to give brief biographies and eulogies, the time for each being seven minutes. President Coffman will make a brief preliminary statement and will introduce the persons who are to make these brief addresses. When the person speaking for Dr. Folwell arises, the hall will be darkened and a photograph of Dr. Folwell will be thrown on the screen. That photograph will remain while the seven-minute address concerning him is delivered. In like manner the others will follow in succession. The occasion is informal and no academic dress will be worn. There will be a reading stand provided so that the addresses may be read, if desired. They should be timed to exactly seven minutes each.

Very cordially yours,

*E. B. Pierce*

Chairman. Committee on University Functions

EBP/F



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
COMMITTEE ON UNIVERSITY FUNCTIONS  
MINNEAPOLIS

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN

February 13, 1933

Miss Gratia Countryman  
Public Library  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

My dear Miss Countryman:

This is just a reminder of the convocation Thursday morning, at 11:30, in Northrop Memorial Auditorium.

It has been arranged that those who are to take part in the program meet in the President's Office, on the second floor of the Administration Building, at 11:15 and go in a body from there to the Auditorium. I hope this plan will meet with your approval.

You will recall I am sure that the addresses that morning are limited to seven minutes each.

Very cordially yours,



Chairman

EF/F