



Frances Densmore Papers

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REMINISCENCES OF FRANK SHERMAN

Among the earlier residents of Red Wing was Watts Sherman, who came here in 1855. He was born in New York but came here from Cassapolis, Michigan, a town about 8 miles from Dowagiac. Comparatively few of our pioneers came from Michigan, but Watts Sherman brought a business ability and tenacity of purpose that contributed to the history of the town. He was here before the Philleos and Richters who were among the earliest families. Red Wing remembers him chiefly as a business man, and his personal tastes were kept largely to himself. Probably few of his associates knew that Macauley's History of England was his favorite reading and that he studied Latin when his daughters were taking that subject in the High School. Throughout his long life he was a quiet reader and a self-educated man. He had a hobby, which is urged upon business men of the present day. His hobby was poultry raising and he specialized in brown leghorns, exhibiting at County Fairs and winning numerous silver cups as awards. He also appreciated and raised good horses.

The Richters came here in 1856 from White Pigeon, Michigan and soon afterward the firm of Richter and Sherman, general merchandise, came into existence. John Richter was born in Germany, he and John Kappel's father coming from towns on opposite sides of the Rhine but in sight of each other. His wife was an Englishwoman named Lancaster, and after their marriage they came from Germany to America as he wanted to avoid military service. She died when her first baby was born and the little girl began life with the imposing name of Magdelane Lancaster Richter. As Mrs. Watts Sherman she was known and widely beloved as "Lane Sherman." While she was still an infant her father

married a Miss Marvin, and the members of the Richter family whom many recall were John, Albert and Mollie, children of the second marriage.

The Richter family took up their abode in the second story of a building at the northwest corner of Main and Plum Streets, opposite the present store of Ferrin and Son, the store of Richter and Sherman being on the first floor. The Philleos lived in the next building, and Mrs. Philleo and Mrs. Richter were sisters. In that building was Philleo Hall, where the local gatherings were held and Fayette F. Philleo was the pioneer in the clay industry of the region. He had a general store, and was city marshall in 1857.

Watts Sherman was married to Magdelane Lancaster Richter in 1856, the wedding taking place in the Crystal Palace Hotel which stood on the present site of the Post Office, a location occupied later by the National Hotel. Libby Adams (remembered as Mrs. Ford Smith) was bridesmaid. The young couple took up their abode in a house on Fourth Street, back of the present Sherman's store, and there Frank was born on November 1st, 1857. A month later the family moved to the present Sherman residence on the corner of Fourth and Franklin Streets, the house being unchanged to this day except that a lean-to kitchen at the rear has been replaced by a more commodious addition. The inside finishing, and the arrangement of doors, windows, rooms and stairway has not been altered and the home is a dignified example of Red Wing's early architecture. It is believed that no other residence has been so well preserved and that no resident of Red Wing has lived in one house as long and as continuously as Frank Sherman.

In early days the house was painted white with green blinds and there was a picket fence around it. Outside this fence was a long bench -- perhaps 12 or 15 feet long -- where the children used to gather in the evenings. Frank says that the old bench had the initials of almost everybody cut in its wood, and we wish that bench could have been preserved with its registration of Youth in the early years of Red Wing. Frank remembers holding the wicks straight when his mother used candles.

The Richters and Philleos moved away from Main Street when Frank was a little boy, Mr. Richter building the house on Third Street which the family occupied until about 1907. Houses have been built on either side, but this house has some important connections with the history of Red Wing. John Richter Jr. married Lavinia [blank in MS.] a woman of unusual grace and charm who was a telegraph operator in the days when the entrance of a woman into that vocation was almost unknown. During the war she knew more than anyone else in Red Wing but no one ever learned anything from her. It is said that the first telephone in a Red Wing house was at the Richter's, as the first telephone operator, a man named Buckley, roomed there and had a telephone in his room.

The Philleos moved to the house at the end of Fifth Street which became familiar as Dr. Jaehnig's residence. There was a mass of hazel brush between that house and the Sherman's but Frank remembers especially a large cornfield across the road from his house. His mother said he used to get lost in the high corn when he was a little boy.

The other children in the Sherman family were William, Philleo, Frances, Nellie, Gertrude, and Leigh Watts. Two others died in infancy, and according to the custom of the village, were buried

close to the family home.

There were long boards for sidewalks in those days -- some houses had one long board in front and some had none. It was hard to go around on those walks by the light of lanterns, and in many places there were no boards at all. Frank's earliest business venture was a "stand" in the alley back of the Tee pee Tonka hotel. It was under the stairs to the second story and had a front that let down. When a boat came in, Frank bought a barrel of apples and sold them at his "stand" out of school hours.

The record of Frank Sherman's attendance at school is of unusual interest as he says that he "went to school all over the place." His first adventure in education was at Harmony Hall, which was in the second story of a house on the southwest corner of Main and Fulton Streets. Some remember it as the Healy house, and that the first story was below the present level of the street. Tille Healy married Will Hauenstein, and there were several members of the Healy family.

Frank then attended school in a house which is now 1020 Main Street and the home of Harry Strom. The front part of this house stood with the end toward the street and Martha Densmore (Mrs. Henry Hodgeman) taught the school. Her father, Judge Orrin Densmore, erected the building on land which adjoined the homestead. From there Frank went to the red schoolhouse where the Masonic Building now stands, and education seemed to begin to pall upon the lad as he recalls that the benches had no backs. He next attended a school on Seventh Street, near the present residence of Mrs. Agnes Zorn. This school was taught by Mrs. Chamberlain who later married Mr. Thorpe and was a prominent factor in the life of early Red Wing.

When the Public School opened Frank was there, -- on the first

day. His teacher was Jennie Palmer who later became the wife of Nathan Stearns. She taught here for many years and went from here to Washington, D. C. where she held a position in one of the Departments. The Public School had eight rooms, four on each floor, and it was located where the High School now stands. The old bell is all that remains, and we hear it toll on all festal occasions, or see it drawn through the streets in its golden chariot. A German church stood on the location before the Public School was built and a man named Dr. Blecken preached there.

In speaking of his education, Frank said, "I quit school when I was seventeen because they said I would die if I kept on. All the rest of the boys have died and I'm still in business." He named some of his school associates -- John Elder, Robert Jamieson, James Teele, Charles and Will Webster, and John Lind who held important political positions and became Governor of the State. The last named was born in one of the houses on lower Broadway, back of the present Y.M.C.A. Among the "boys" of that set were George and Ed Backus whose father built the house at the Northeast corner of Fifth and Fulton Streets, now occupied by John Trautner. This house has been changed by the addition of broad porches but the lines of the brick structure remain. Ed. Backus became a prominent lumberman. During those years Watts Sherman withdrew from partnership with John Richter and owned a farm. Then he went into the grocery business with A. J. Clark under the firm name of Sherman and Clark. This partnership continued about three years, the place of business being on Main Street, next to Tee Pee Tonka Hotel which stood on the corner of Main and Bush, on the present location of Maurice Nelson's store. Thus the site of the store of Sherman and Clark corresponded to the west half of the Leader Building. Mr. Clark's

wife was a sister of William and John Webster, and is still remembered by many as "widow Clark," living in a neat little brick house next to the present home of Mrs. J. E. Teele, on the southwest corner of Fourth and Dakota Streets.

When Frank was going down town one morning in 1865, he saw about a dozen men in front of the printing office, at the corner of Main and Bush Streets where Kuhn's drug store now stands. That was a good crowd in those days and he went to see what it was all about. The printing office was on the third floor of the building but there was a bulletin board on the street where the news was posted, and the men were reading a notice. Abraham Lincoln had been assassinated, and the little town of Red Wing joined in the nation's mourning. The owner of that printing office was named Perkins -- he married Flora Williams, a sister of Mrs. Henry McIntire. It is thought that Lucius Hubbard owned this plant later.

At least two years before Frank left the Public School his father built the present Sherman store and went into the grocery business for himself, owning it until his death on February 8, 1909, when it became the property of Frank Sherman who has conducted it ever since that time. The store was thus built in the year 1872, or thereabouts. The land for the store was bought from Will Luce's father, and the Luce's lived a short distance to the west, in that block. There was a spring under the Luce's house and people went there to get water. The Jordan stream, remembered by so many citizens, flowed near the location and it was necessary to sink piles for the foundation of the building. Mr. Sherman tried to get the corner where the Nord store now stands but it was in litigation and could not be purchased. About eight years

later the litigation was settled and George Wilkinson bought the whole corner, putting up business blocks and the old Casino which stood around the corner on Bush Street, on the lot next the alley. But in its first years the Sherman store stood alone. A little later Mr. Hawkins built where the Enz sport shop now stands, and Ole Simmons and Charles Brink built between Sherman and Hawkins, making three stores in a row -- which was regarded as a notable advance in the business section of the town. But it was terribly muddy along there because it was so near the Jordan. Tradition says a pig was once mired there, which leaves little to be said about the condition of the street.

On leaving the Public School Frank began to deliver goods for his father, but his education was not at an end. The Parish School had opened by that time and he went there an hour or so a day, taking some special studies. In addition to the schools mentioned, he remembers there was a school upstairs in a building opposite the Richter home, on the corner, and he thinks it was an Episcopal school. This was in a building occupied many years later by Dr. Hewitt as a laboratory, and now moved back to the alley, on the west side of Franklin Street.

Frank Sherman remembers the four-horse stage that used to come swinging down Main Street on its run between St. Paul and Prairie du Chien, changing horses here. The stage-stop was on the south side of Main Street, about halfway between Bush and Plum. The stages ran along when the river was frozen over, the steamboats furnishing communication with the outside world during the rest of the year. If the water was high, a gangplank was put from the boat to the porch of the Metropolitan Hotel which stood on Levee Street, below Plum Street. James Teele's father built

that hotel. It was a great event when the first boat came through, and the boys used to go on top of Barn Bluff to watch for it, as it came through Lake Pepin.

Hotels were important in those days of slow travel. Dave Kelley had a hotel where the Armory now stands, known as the Kelley House. Many of us can remember Jo Batlo, of the Batlo House, a location now occupied by the Quandt Food Shoppe, but few know that Mr. Batlo was a Frenchman from Alsace-Lorraine, that borderland where Frenchmen and Germans mingled and both languages were commonly spoken.

Two Jews went into the dry goods business here, but did not stay long. This was not a good place for them. Milo Wiedenfelt had a store in the Tee Pee Tonka Hotel, and a Jew named Elson had a similar store across the street, on the present site of the Kuhn drug store. Mr. Lowater had a store where the St. James Hotel is now located, selling glassware and many sorts of merchandise.

Bishop Welles lived in the house now occupied by Will Sherman (610 West Third Street) and Mr. Thomas, father-in-law of Governor Hubbard, built the house next it, on the corner of Third and Franklin, both houses being without the west "wing" which was added later.

There was good fellowship throughout the little community. Frank says, "If a poor man's house burned down, they passed around the hat and got money enough to build him another house, right away."

The tale of those early years would not be complete without a mention of the time when Dan Rice's circus was coming to town and the rhinoceros fell through the bridge down by the Training School.

That was a pretty frail bridge and the cage with the rhinoceros was heavy. Half the town went down to see them get it out and on the road again.

After delivering groceries a year for his father, Frank went into the store as a clerk. He says, "People don't know what work is nowadays. Our hours were long -- we worked 15 or 18 hours a day." Sherman's store was a center of sociability. All the important affairs of the nation for several decades were settled around Sherman's stove.

The stock carried in the store consisted of staple groceries such as coffee, sugar, flour and starch. Cove oysters could be bought at almost any time of the year, and sometimes fresh oysters came in on the stage. Frank remembers the first barrel of oatmeal they got. It was the only breakfast food they carried and it came from Iowa. Striped stick candy stood in tall glass jars with tin covers. Molasses was bought in 50-gallon hogsheads. The vegetables ~~were~~ raised near town. Josh Allyn brought in vegetables, and Bronson had a large vegetable garden -- about four blocks -- starting from the place where Ernest Rehder lives on Fourth Street and extended back into the country. As for the farmers, Frank said "When we settled up with the farmers we had to take bad butter. We had bad butter in those days." They had to look out for the Indians who used to stand around and put things under their blankets.

Watts Sherman bought his apples in the orchards in Michigan, taking all the apples in an orchard, and packing the best ones. Every fall he went down to get his apples and shipped 10 or 15 cars of them, selling them in Lake City, Hastings, Cannon Falls and in all the neighboring towns. He was the only grocer who did this, and one year he brought in 17 carloads. There were many varieties --

some with names no longer familiar to the public. Among them were Baldwins, Northern Spies, Greenings, Russetts, Ballflowers, Talman Sweets, Gillflowers and Rambeaus. Crisp and clean they were packed in layers and the heads of the barrels firmly nailed in place. Out of a cool cellar they were brought in winter -- a luxury of which we know little at the present day. They were not expensive. A barrel sold for \$2.00 to \$3.00. Only a few years ago he found the sales slip of a barrel at \$2.15.

The County Fair was a gala event, with races and displays of stock. The Fair ground was where the Training School now stands and a man in Hay Creek had some running horses that he used to bring over. General Garrard and General McLean of Frontenac brought angora sheep and fancy cattle for exhibit. They had about the only fine stock in the region. About two years ago, Frank sold his business to the Quandt & Company, with which he is still identified.

Watts Sherman died, as already stated, in 1909. The death of his wife occurred in 1921.

The marriages of their children are as follows: -- William Philleo Sherman married Emma Smith in 1892, their children (except two who died in infancy) being Charlotte, Margaret and Dorothy. Margaret married Brooke Thomas in [blank in MS.] and they have no children. Dorothy married Lawrence Lawson in [blank in MS.] and their son William, [blank in MS.] carries his grandfather's name. Frances married Carver Worthington Barber, a dentist, about 1892, their children being Sherman, Belle and Willmar. Sherman married [blank in MS.] and Belle married [blank in MS.]. Willmar, the youngest, served in the Navy during the war and died in 1920 as the result of an accident.

Nellie married Charles Lea Fowle in 1898, their children being Evelyn and Lead, the latter being married to Jean Brubaker in 1928.

Leigh Watts married Bertha Kishner in 1917, their children being named Jane and Leigh Watts.