

MISS EMILY WARD, COMMONLY KNOWN AS "AUNT EMILY"¹BY MRS. GEORGE N. JONES²

She was born in Manlius, Onondaga Co., N. Y., March 16th, 1809. Her father, Eber Ward, was the son of a Vermont Baptist clergyman. Her mother, Sally Potter, was the daughter of Capt. Potter, a retired English shipmaster. While still very young she moved with her father's family to his native Vermont; shortly afterwards to Toronto, Canada, returning one year later to Vermont where they remained five years. In 1818 the immense labor of a journey from Vermont to Kentucky was attempted in a canvas covered sleigh. Before reaching that state the mother succumbed to the hardships of the trip, became ill of pleurisy and died, leaving Aunt Emily, then nine years of age, mother to three younger children. The father abandoned his journey to Kentucky, settled in Conneaut, O., where he remained four years. In 1822 this family again took up their wanderings settling at Yankee Point on the St. Clair River. They were attracted to this particular locality because Samuel Ward,³ brother of Eber Ward, had purchased a large tract of land in this vicinity and already owned several schooners which he utilized in trading.

Aunt Emily and her father came up the river in one of Uncle Sam's vessels, they comprising the household at this time, the younger children joining them later. Aunt Emily was twelve years old when she began her career as a housekeeper an occupation which she never laid down, and at the age of thirteen added school teaching to her other accomplishments.

This seems a fitting place to pause and note the loving characteristics of this girl of sixteen; the budding of that strong personality which blossomed later into the sturdy, self-reliant qualities, the true philanthropic instincts of this admirable woman. Aunt Emily came into the lake country when it was a wilderness, lived when the foundations of a State were being laid and knew with what difficulty this goodly superstructure, comely in appearance, was built. Her life, marked by brave encounters with many things hard to be endured, the center of

¹Read at the annual meeting, June, 1911. See sketch, Vol. XXI., p. 367, this series.

²Mrs. Jones is a resident of Marine City and the wife of ex-Senator George N. Jones and a relative of "Aunt Emily." On behalf of the Women's Literary Clubs of Marine City Mrs. Jones presented this Society with a photograph finely framed of Aunt Emily and also a copy of the volume of Grandmother's Stories.

³For a sketch of Capt. Samuel Ward, see Vol. XXI., pp. 336-367, this series.

a wide and widening circle of wholesome influences, was prolonged to its reward in affectionate gratitude and years of retrospection on past good deeds and their ineffable results. As an illustration of her bravery in danger, presence of mind in distress and unflinching wisdom and genius to execute I cite the following stories:¹

THE SAGINAW INDIANS

"It was in the early summer of 1826, for I was seventeen years old when this incident happened. It was training-day as it was called, and every man and boy who was well enough and old enough to carry a gun had to go to the county seat to be trained in military movements. That morning father and Eber and every man and boy in the settlement, except a poor lame shoemaker had gone to Port Huron, twenty miles away, to the training and the women and children were left alone. But no one thought anything about it for the country was at peace and though there were Indians about they were friendly, and we had nothing to fear from them. *

"It was a bright and lovely morning when we went down to the river bank to see father and Eber off. The river shone like a mirror and reflected trees that overhung its banks so clearly that it looked like twin trees growing into its shining depths. The robins were singing their loudest and everything was so fresh and beautiful and peaceful that I lingered a long time dreaming over it. But the cares of a house-keeper drove me home to do my morning work.

"I had put the house to rights and had just finished baking my bread when the door suddenly opened and in poured a great number of Indians in full war-paint and dress, muskets in their hands and knives and tomahawks in their belts. They paid no more attention to me than if I had been a block of wood, but went to the cupboard and took the bread and cake and everything eatable. They drank some vinegar there was in a barrel in the corner and then began looking around after something in particular, but which they didn't find; finally, one old fellow looked at me and said, 'Whiskey?' I shook my head, and told him we hadn't any. He started to open the door into the room where the whiskey barrel was, but I stepped ahead of him quick, put my hand through the door handle, looked him straight in the eye and told him he could not go in there.

"When they first came in I seized the broom, as it was the only weapon left in the house, and a woman's weapon at that, and when some of the

¹Francis B. Hurlbut who styles herself one of the "Little Girls," collected nineteen stories and an introduction which was published by the Riverside Press of Cambridge under title of "Grandmother's Stories" and this book was presented to Grandma, otherwise Aunt Emily, March 16, 1889, on her eightieth birthday.

young men tried to pull me away from the door I hung on tight with one hand and struck right and left with the broom handle as hard as I could strike hitting an Indian with every blow.

"I knew I might as well die fighting as any other way, and that if I couldn't keep them from the whiskey barrel they would get drunk and kill every woman and child in the place. After a little some of the young men made motions as if to strike me; but this old fellow, who seemed to be their chief, said in Indian, 'Leave her to me. I'll put her to sleep.' I knew what he meant, for I could understand some Indian, but I made up my mind that I'd not let go that door as long as I had life to hold it. Then the old Indian made as if to strike me with a stick, but I didn't flinch, and kept on looking him right in the eye. Then he threw it down on the floor, and said 'Pick it up!' I knew that if I stooped to pick it up he would strike me on the back of the head, and that I would die without making any outcry; so I shook my head and would not pick it up. "In the meantime I could hear Sallie screaming and crying in the yard, for the young Indians were amusing themselves beating her with long, slender whips for no other purpose than for the fun of hearing her scream. But just at that moment she put her head in at the door, and I shouted to her, 'Sallie, run quick, and tell the men!' Now I knew that there were no men around but the lame old shoemaker, but I said it for a double purpose: one to get Sallie away, and the other that the old Indian, who understood English, might think that there were a good many men around and so go away for the fear of them.

"Sallie ran quick as a flash, and the old fellow, who had understood what I said as I expected he would, left me, and began talking in a low tone with some of the older Indians. They seemed to come to some sudden decision for he gave a word of command and they all left the house as abruptly as they had entered it, pushed off into the river and were half-way across before Sallie got back with the news 'that the shoemaker was afraid, and would not come.'

"I had thought that they might kill me, but I didn't seem to have any fear. I remember that I thought I might just as well be killed then as after they got drunk. But after they were gone I was so weak and trembled so that I could not stand up. I had to sit down and I shook like a leaf in the wind for hours after. It took me several days to get over the nervous depression that followed. I wasn't brave, I was afraid they would get the whisky and then kill everybody.

"These Indians were warriors from the Saginaw tribe, who were very fierce and warlike; and they were on their way to Detroit to try and release from prison their chief, old Kishkawko who had a year before killed a man in the streets of Detroit. Just in pure wantonness, without the least provocation he had thrown a tomahawk at a white man who

was walking peacefully along, and struck him down. He was arrested, tried and condemned to be hanged.

"The Indians thought it an overwhelming disgrace "to be hung like dogs" as they said, and they determined, if they couldn't release him to give him poison. I suppose the reason they went, when I told Sally to run after the men, was that going for the purpose they were, they didn't wish anything to defeat the purpose. They were afraid that if the men came there would be a fight and they would be delayed and perhaps stopped altogether. Kishkawko took poison the morning he was to be hung. They found the white man's government too strong for them to rescue him, so they gave him poison."

GOING AFTER STRAWBERRIES

"One day in June, as soon as dinner was over, Sallie, and a young woman who worked for uncle Sam, and uncle Sam's little boy and I went over to the Canada side of St. Clair River to gather wild strawberries that grew there in great abundance. We crossed the river in a row-boat and when we got on shore we pulled the boat high up on the beach, so that the waves would not carry it off. We had a gay time filling our pails and baskets with the ripe fruit. When we got through we were rather tired and very leisurely took our way to the boat. We did not notice that the small boy had gone ahead of us. When we were almost to the beach he came running back to us, shouting, 'Boaty! boaty!'

"I knew in a moment that he had done some mischief and I set my strawberries down and ran as fast as I could toward the river. Sure enough he had pushed the boat into the water and she was floating off with the current. I waded out clear up to my neck, but I could not reach her, and as I could not swim I had to wade back.

"By this time the girls and the small boy were on the shore, and as I came back they set up a dismal wail; for the boat was gone, and here we four were, miles from any habitation and with a fine prospect of spending the night in the woods, where the wolves and bears still roamed and occasionally Indians were seen. We sat in a very melancholy plight, the girls crying, the boy looking doleful, and I thinking of what we could do. There was an island about a mile below, near the Canada shore and I thought the current would carry the boat to that island and strand her on its northeastern point; and how to get to that point was a question.

"I looked around the beach and found there was some drift-wood of logs and some long poles that pioneers use in building mud-chimneys. I thought that with these we could build a raft, if we could only get something to tie them together with; but there wasn't a string a yard

long, except those we used to hold up our stockings with as was the fashion in those days. But strings, or no strings, that raft had to be made, and what were sunbonnets and aprons and dresses and skirts for if in an emergency they wouldn't tie a raft together?

"I told the girls my plan, and they said they didn't believe I ever could get the boat again in such manner, but they went to work with a will, because I wanted them to and because it was the only way to get home. After a great deal of hard work a raft was completed, tied with the aforesaid material. Luckily the fashion of those days provided the women with a long chemise that hung down to their ankles and covered her much more as to her neck and arms than many a fashionable belle of these times is covered by what people are pleased to call 'full dress.'

"You may be sure that raft was a very frail affair to sail the waters of the great St. Clair River, and Sallie said she knew that we would be drowned. It was only large enough for two, and Margaret and I went, leaving Sallie to take care of the boy. It required a brave heart to go or stay; for in the distance we could hear the occasional howl of the wolf and on the water was the little raft that looked as if it might fall to pieces at a moment's notice. The plan was that Margaret and I should stand up and pole the raft; but as soon as we got from the shore Margaret was afraid to stand up, and so she sat down and cried, and I did the work. The current helped a great deal, and after a time we could see the head of the island. We knew there was an encampment of friendly Indians there at that time, fishing and hunting, but we were not afraid of them.

"By this time the moon was up, and as soon as we could see the Island we saw all of the Indians down on the shore gazing eagerly in our direction. They didn't seem to understand what was coming towards them. But as we got nearer and nearer and the bright moonlight shone directly upon us, and they discovered that it was only two forlorn girls on a crazy raft, they screamed and shouted with laughter. I didn't care for that, for by this time I could see our boat that had stranded about where I thought she would.

"The Indians were very kind to us; the men went and got the boat and untied the raft, and the women wrung out our clothes and took us to a wigwam and helped us put ours on; then they helped us into the boat and put the rest of the wet clothes in and with many friendly grunts and exclamations they pushed our boat out into the stream and we hastened back to Sallie and the boy. Here I will say that I have never seen an Indian treated with kindness but what he returned it by equal kindness, and he never forgets a favor as I know from experience.

"Sallie and the boy were rejoiced when we got back, and they dried

their tears that had been plentifully flowing, put on their wet clothes and we started for home. We agreed amongst ourselves that we would slip into the house the back way, change our clothes and not tell any one of the adventure, so no one knew of it for some time. But Margaret had a beau to whom she told the story after a while; and it was such a good story that, manlike, he told it to some one else, and so everyone knew it in a little time, and we were well laughed at.

"I related that story, a good many years afterwards to Mr. Stanley, famous for his pictures of Indians. We were passing the island in a steamer of your uncle's and I was telling him something of the early days of St. Clair River settlements. He remarked that the incident would make a pretty picture. Not long after that he brought me on my sixtieth birthday that picture."

In 1827 they returned to Conneaut, O., where they lived till 1831. During this time the two little sisters, having grown to womanhood under the fostering care of Aunt Emily, married and went to preside over homes of their own, Sallie becoming Mrs. Brindle and Abba the wife of B. F. Owen. Soon after her father, Eber Ward, was appointed keeper of Mackinaw light.⁵ The care and labor of this new venture devolved, as other ventures had done, upon the slender shoulders of this young girl. These duties were faithfully discharged as all others were during a long, eventful life. An example of her courage and bravery was furnished when during a storm the tower was found to be shaking at its foundations and climbing up she rescued the lamp and other valuables and reached the ground just as the structure fell. We cannot help but feel that this life was spared for a purpose.

In 1845 they returned to Newport, formerly Yankee Point,⁶ where they passed the succeeding twenty-two years. These years although saddened by the death of both her sisters were among the happiest and busiest of her happy and busy life. The death of the two sisters gave into the hands of Aunt Emily a family of ten over which she exercised the same kind guardianship she had previously exercised over their mothers. There was always a big family in the old house at Newport, which faced the St. Clair river and was surrounded by a garden the size of four

⁵This lighthouse was situated on Bois Blanc Island near Mackinac. It had been built too near the water and fears were entertained of its falling. The father was at Mackinac, Eber junior, on the Great Lakes and no one but Emily and Bolivar, an adopted boy, in the house and none on the island but a cowardly Frenchman and his Indian wife. At five o'clock, seeing that the lighthouse must go, Aunt Emily climbed up the one hundred and fifty steps and carried down the lamps and heavy reflectors. She made five trips, each time leaving poor Bolivar in tears, positive that she would be killed. She and the boy watched the fall of the lighthouse from the woods but their house was uninjured.—*Grandmother's Stories*, p. 126.

⁶So called from being settled by Yankees from the East.—*Grandmother's Stories*, p. 74.

city blocks. Freedom to develop their own individuality as well as wise restraint was found there.

Aunt Emily's mission was among children and it was a mission in which her devotion was earnest and unwearying. Many not connected with her by the ties of relationship but who were left orphaned and neglected became her foster children. "She made men and women of them." Soon the necessity for better educational facilities for her children faced her and now she began to gather golden sheaves. Eber Brock Ward,⁷ the little brother left in her charge by a dying mother, the first of a long line of little ones to receive her loving care, was by this time a prosperous business man with children of his own. Together this brother and sister built a schoolhouse for their children, equipped it with charts, globes and many other appliances which were seldom employed as aids to education in those days; it was called an academy; and higher mathematics and the various sciences required in the preparation for college were taught there. A college graduate was in charge of the school, but Aunt Emily had charge of the schoolmaster, the schoolhouse, the pupils, and was a board of education of one. This institution took the place of an ordinary high school, two district schools being the only schools in town. Others were allowed to participate in its advantages on payment of small sums, three dollars per year being charged as tuition with twenty-five cents added if the student pursued the study of languages. The present Marine City High School is on the old academy site, Aunt Emily having donated house and grounds for that purpose on her departure from the place. The building now stands at the corner of Main and St. Clair streets, and was used for a City Hall for several years and afterward sold to the Presbyterian Synod for a Church.

From this old academy came lawyers, merchants, manufacturers, physicians, congressmen, postmaster-general and many noted men and women of affairs. One authority asserts, that six of the homeless, orphaned boys are worth ten millions to-day, one a western railroad man, two are heavy manufacturers; also that Aunt Emily wholly or in part, raised, educated, and started in life not less than twenty-nine men and women. As samples of her generosity, to one she gave fifteen thousand dollars the day he graduated from the University; to another like opportunities and five thousand, and to still another a fine home. A full record

⁷Aunt Emily said her brother Eber had the first rolling mills in the Northwest, opened the first Bessemer steel manufactory, sailed the first boat on Lake Superior, taking it overland at what she called the Sault Falls Carry, a distance of three or four miles, and was one of the first and largest business men in the Northwest. Mr. C. M. Burton says he was the richest man in Michigan at the time of his death. The contest over his will claimed the attention of lawyers and psychologists as it involved the subject of spiritualism. See Thomas M. Cooley, *Sketch of David Darwin Hughes*, Vol. VII., p. 513, this series; *Detroit Tribune*, Oct. 15, 1875; *Detroit News*, Oct. 16, 1875, Vol. XXI., p. 349.

of her charities was never known, even to her most intimate friends. Many whom she befriended thought her the greatest woman the country ever produced. Certainly *no man* of her day was so great a humanitarian.

Aside from her mission of promoting the welfare of the young, she still had energy to devote to the happiness of her friends and neighbors. While living in Marine City she was constantly sent for when people were sick and in distress, she acted as physician, nurse and counselor, was always aiding someone, and people were always seeking her advice. She was a great lover of flowers and maintained a fine flower garden from which the sick in Marine City were constant recipients.

During all this interval she was also actively engaged in industrial and financial efforts, being associated with her brother Eber Brock Ward in his business, taking the superintendency of interior finishing of a large line of freighters and passenger boats which he built for the lake trade. Aunt Emily's workshop was in the second story of the building known as the Ward general store, furnishing employment for all the women and girls of the town. The twenty-five hundred population were nearly all employed by this brother and sister. Her profits were taken in stock in the boats until she became a large vessel owner, being worth many thousand dollars. She had many offers of marriage but always said she was too busy to consider them seriously.

It is a singular fact that not one of Aunt Emily's immense family, is at present a resident of Marine City, formerly Newport, and her only monument is the Emily Ward Chapter No. 205 of the Order of Eastern Stars.

In 1867 she moved to Detroit and took charge of her brother's house, residing with him for three years. In 1870 she built a home at 807 Fort St. West and continued to live there until the time of her death.⁸ The house is still occupied by her niece Mrs. Florence Brindle Mayhew who is one of the four survivors of Aunt Emily's immediate family, the other three being Dr. Orville Owen of Detroit, Mr. T. C. Owen of Ypsilanti and Mrs. A. Aubrey of Wyandotte.

March 16th, 1887 a reception⁹ was held at her home in Detroit to

⁸For picture of residence of Aunt Emily, see Farmer's *Hist. of Detroit*, p. 403.

⁹The following "children" at her reception testified to Aunt Emily's help to them. The first letter from the Postmaster-General's office in Washington, D. C., written by one of her boys, Don M. Dickinson, was to Aunt Emily. Dr. Orville Owen of Detroit, was called Aunt Emily's "Rosebud." Christian Otjen, a German boy, whose parents lived in St. Clair had been one of Aunt Emily's boys for some time. One day a poor, ragged, dirty boy came to her house and said "Aunt Emily you take all good children, I wish you would take me." She did and lived to see these brothers become prominent men, Theobald serving three years in Congress from Milwaukee, Wis., and Christian becoming superintendent of Bay View Rolling Mills. Ira Mayhew, a protege of hers, was Superintendent of Public Instruction from 1845-49. George Wasey, another boy, became a prominent lawyer. We have been unable to locate all of the twenty-nine said to have belonged to her family.

celebrate her eightieth birthday. Fully six hundred people came, paid their respects on this occasion, and many telegrams were received from friends and admirers, among the latter being one from Hon. Don M. Dickinson, Washington, D. C., then Postmaster-General, who wished to be remembered as one of Aunt Emily's "boys." I received a letter from Congressman Otjen of Milwaukee (spoken of in note) who congratulated this society on its efforts to perpetuate her memory, saying he knew of no woman more worthy of having her life and character preserved in history. She died August, 1891, aged eighty-two years.

In introducing Miss Ward I will not attempt a final summary of the virtues of this great woman, feeling it is beyond me, but will use the language of Mrs. L. B. Parker, wife of her physician and next door neighbor during her twenty-two years in Marine City. As I talked to her last Friday she said in part, "She was the most beautiful character I ever knew. O, how I loved her! I could not help it! I cannot find words to express my admiration. She was wonderful."

I think you will join me in saying "Though dead yet she liveth in the hearts of those who knew her best, and though at rest from her labors, her works do follow her."