

# Who's Who in Wisconsin Rapids

The Who's Who column will be run each Saturday in the Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune. It will include a brief sketch of the life of citizens who have helped make history for Wisconsin Rapids.

## Jeanette Wood Balderston



In a little brown house on top of the hill at the corner of Third and Vine Sts. lives "Grandma". It seems quite fitting that she should head the list of pioneer women—having lived for sixty-seven years in this same little house.

Sarah Jeanette Wood was born in Seneca Falls, New York, June 24, 1834. When a wee little girl she came with her people to Fort Hill, Ill. Chicago was then a mere trading post. The family lived some years on the Illinois farm, where the mother died.

### Form Pioneer Family

Joseph Wood, the father, was a born pioneer, and in 1846 he came a-journeyming into the wilds of Wisconsin and finding the pine lands good, he built him a home, and for him Wood county was named. Three times he made the long journey, with teams, from Illinois to Grand Rapids with the little daughter, before she would stay in the Indian country.

A new mother, Matilda Compton, and small brothers coming during these years, helped to make life less lonely for the little girl Jeanette.

Mrs. Balderston tells that on one of these journeys her father brought one wagon filled with pinks, lilac and honeysuckle bushes ("York State" roses and "pineys" packed by the capable hands of her stepmother, thus starting these shrubs in this part of the country.

Mrs. Balderston tells many interesting tales of the early days. She says there is no question about whom the law-abiding feared most in the early days—the redmen or the rivermen. The Indians were very plentiful but very peaceful but the rivermen were inveterate fighters and worse drinkers.

Mrs. Balderston says that the coming of the stage was always an event.

One day it brought Thomas Scott with two barrels of merchandise. Near where the Wood County National Bank stands Thomas emptied the barrels, put boards across them, spread out his merchandise, and went into business. The same Thomas Scott who built the old Pomainville home on Third St. who built a "near" palace in Merrill, and who founded our T. B. Scott Public Library. In those days this was Portage county, Plover being the county seat and many a night the young people drove to Plover to dances (horse power, not motor). Dances and candy pulls, sleigh rides and the ladies aid society furnished entertainment for these peaceful people, and the lumberjacks furnished the thrills.

### Recalls First Church

Mrs. Balderston says the first church was held in the old McRaith home on First St. N. everyone Protestants and Catholics attending.

When Jeanette Wood was nineteen she was wooed and won by William Balderston from Baltimore, Maryland. The courtship was a stormy one and on Feb. 12, 1853 the lovers eloped. The would-be bride went down to the "Wisconsin House" operated by Geo. A. Neeves and his good wife Mary to meet the rest of the bridal party. The groom had a team and sleigh nearby but as the wedding party crossed the road the irate father saw them and then trouble began. Miss Else, the bridesmaid ran madly up "Pumpkin Hill" and into a house standing about where Mrs. Elizabeth Daly's house is today. She was pursued by the father, and by the time he discovered his mistake, his daughter, in the arms of the best man, was carried over the creek which ran across the road near where the Hammer House is now, and minus one slipper, was taken down Third St. then an Indian trail, to a mill boarding house, back of the present Ellis home. This house was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. White (Mr. White was an uncle of Mrs. Henry Harding, Oak St.)

Here the wedding party once more gathering, the bride was loaned some shoes, and after hours of driving, they reached New Buffalo, Sauk Co., Wis. There in the early morning they routed the Justice of the Peace out of bed, and standing by the kitchen stove the marriage vows were taken.

### Named "High Street"

July 3rd, the same year, 1853 Mrs. Balderston moved into her present home, the only other building on 3rd Street being the mill boarding house. Pine trees, blackberry and raspberry bushes filled the country all around. Mrs. Balderston's husband called the present Third St. High St. in memory of one in Baltimore, tho' it was commonly known as "Quality Row."

To Mrs. Balderston was born eight children, three of whom are living. Joseph W. Balderston of Sioux City,

Iowa, S. W. Balderston own lives with his mother and Mrs. John E. Daly.

Gradually "the neighbors" came to the south end of town, the Sampsons, the Neeves and the Scotts, the Butterfields and the Rows, the Wheelans, Whitneys, Purdys and Smiths. The Kromers and Fatzingers, the Wilters and Webbs, the Hunts and the Woodworths, the Naylor and Moshers, the Wordens, the Comptons, the Berniers, the Sweeneys, the Robert Grace family, and a little later the Emmons, LaBreche, Belanger, Bezoir, Bell, Farrish and Lyons, Warren and LeVigne families. Each to help make history and all to lend a helping hand.

Trained nurses were unknown in those days, and countless are the bed-sides where these pioneer women have served. "Auntie" Sampson, Nancy Smith, "Auntie Lem" Kromer and Jeanette Balderston were famous nurses in those days, and scores of Grand Rapids children were given their first bath by these willing faithful hands.

Many a tooth has Grandma Balderston pulled by the good old method of tying a stout string to the offending member, and giving an equally stout pull. And the ears she has pierced for "stylish" little lassies!

### Made Own Telephone

Mrs. Balderston says her first telephone was a piece of red flannel hung on the front of the house to signal Mrs. Henry Jackson (mother of the present Fred H. Jackson) who lived on the west bank of the Wisconsin river. This meant "I'm coming over" and there being no bridge, the row boat journey began.

Mrs. Balderston is a true exponent of the word "neighbor", her willing hands to this day, making pies for her family and her neighbors.

She is a constant reader, her mind being exceptionally keen. Her interest in politics and all present day happenings is quite remarkable. To prove she is a modern woman, tho' more than eighty-six years old, she drove to the polls in spite of the snowy day, and cast her vote for Harding.

### Seen Progress

Mrs. Balderston has seen the Indian trails become paved streets the one-story shanties grow into brick and stone structures, the ferry replaced by the toll bridge, and that by the steel bridge, the ox-cart give place to the horse, and to see the horse fast losing his place to the automobile.

She enjoys an automobile, and finds great pleasure, in driving thru the city and surrounding country and seeing the many changes, each season brings.

There is the inevitable note of sorrow, as the old families and old faces go, yet there is always a quiet welcome to the new friends who come her way. But there is comfort to her in this; that she loves to have her children and their friends, her grandchildren and their friends, and her neighbors "come home."

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 \* Beautiful new drapes at \*  
 \* The Moore Studio. Don't \*  
 \* worry about your togs but \*  
 \* make your appointment. \*  
 \* soon. Get your photo for \*  
 \* Christmas. \* \* \* \* \*

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 \* SEE WEBSTER CIRCUIT \*  
 \* BIG TIME VAUDEVILLE \*  
 \* DALY'S THEATRE \*  
 \* TONIGHT—SUNDAY \*  
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