

Carl Schurz Vrooman (1872-1966) & Julia Scott Vrooman (1876-1981)

Carl was born in Macon County, Missouri on October 25, 1872. He was the son of Judge Hiram Perkins and Sarah (Buffington) Vrooman. His father, a native of New York, was a lawyer, later a judge of the common pleas court, and a land owner. His father moved the family to Kansas where Carl would spend his boyhood years. Carl attended Washburn College in Topeka, Kansas from about 1890 to 1891. He also studied at Harvard University in Massachusetts for about three years. He then studied abroad at Oxford University in England for a few months.

Julia Scott Vrooman was born October 4, 1876 in Bloomington, Illinois. She was born into a 19th century life of privilege being that she was the daughter of Matthew T. and (Julia Green) Scott, one of the most prominent families in McLean County. Her uncle, Adlai E. Stevenson I, also served as Vice President of the United States under President Grover Cleveland.

Her parents, Matthew T. Scott and Julia (Green) Scott moved to McLean County from Kentucky, where they were counted among the elites of the Lexington area. Her father founded the town of Chenoa in 1854 to serve as a base for his work to develop 5,000 acres of prairie land into tenant farms. He ultimately ended up with huge land holdings in Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Her mother Julia Green Scott came from the Upland Southern ascendancy with ancestral connections to Thomas Jefferson and others. She was best known for being twice elected President General of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution. After Matthew's death, she managed the tenant farms in the Chenoa area, and was known for her imperiousness. Matthew and his wife Julia moved the family to Bloomington in 1872 and purchased a home at 701 Taylor Street.

In 1894 when she was about eighteen years old, Julia met Carl while traveling in Europe and their courtship began. Later in life, Julia often said that Carl liked to tell the story of how he won her hand in marriage. She said that Carl would tell everyone that he proposed to her in every cathedral in Europe that they went to and that Julia finally accepted his proposal in Venice when they were on a gondola on a moonlit canal.¹

Almost two years later on December 28, 1896 Carl and Julia were wed at the home of her sister Letitia Scott Bromwell in St. Louis, Missouri. *The Pantagraph* printed a detailed account of the occasion calling it a "brilliant matrimonial event." Carl's brother Frank officiated the wedding and many members of both Julia and Carl's family attended. Because her father Matthew had passed away in 1891, Julia's uncle Adlai E. Stevenson I gave her away. The D.A.R. chapter in St. Louis also gave a "handsome" reception for the newlyweds.² They returned to Europe in 1897 and spent a great deal of time traveling through Switzerland, France, and Germany. They would eventually come to live with her mother in Bloomington in 1900. While Julia and Carl never had any children, the next 69 years of their marriage would be ones filled with bliss which was clearly evident by the many loving and caring letters they wrote to each other when they were apart. Carl wrote in one of his many letters that Julia "was a rare and loveable creature. I've never seen anyone in her class."³

¹ "Julia," *The Pantagraph*, November 3, 1978

² "Vrooman-Scott Wedding," *The Pantagraph*, December 29, 1896

³ "Julia."

Carl was a man of many interests. He began life as a publicist and had been recognized as an able writer early on. He was also a staunch and outspoken supporter of the Democratic Party. But above all was his life-long interest and devotion to the improvement of agriculture. This interest began through his years as Regent of the Kansas State Agricultural College from 1898 to 1900. His marriage to Julia Scott brought with it the large Chenoa farm holdings which had been owned by Julia's father Matthew. Carl became a manager of some of the Scott land holdings and because of this, delved even further into scientific writings and consulted agricultural experts. He referred to himself as a "dirt farmer" and indeed farmed or managed his mother-in-law's tenant farms throughout the Midwest, especially in McLean County.

His financial interests in agriculture are most likely the reason for his appointment as assistant Secretary of Agriculture by President Woodrow Wilson in 1914. He served with Secretary of Agriculture David Houston of St. Louis. Carl had made himself known as a Democratic stalwart in his failed run for United States senator from Illinois, but had dropped out of the race for the sake of party unity. In his acceptance letter to President Wilson, Carl stated that he considered it a privilege to be allowed to cooperate with the President and his administration "in the magnificent and many-sided constructive work" that was being carried on.⁴

As the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, one of his first tasks was touring the country as a spokesman for agriculture and promoting the latest research on the topic. Carl believed that farming should be conducted scientifically and just as importantly, as a business. By this he did not simply mean bookkeeping, but felt that farmers needed to organize for both economic and political advantages. He pushed the importance of marketing as the key to the success of agriculture.

Carl also promoted the Wilson Administration's recently passed legislation, the Smith-Lever Act (1914) that was meant to help farmers across the nation. At the Chicago Banker-Farmer Conference, held the week of July 5, 1915, Carl extolled on the significance of the provisions of the new legislation.⁵ The Smith-Lever Act established a national cooperative extension service that extended outreach programs through land grant universities (such as the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana) to educate rural Americans about advances in agricultural practices and technology which would help farmers increase productivity. It also brought the Department of Agriculture in actual personal touch with farmers throughout the country by establishing county offices with local agents that could assist farmers with individual problems.⁶ In Carl's opinion, this was "agricultural learning democratized, made practical, and given to farmers of the country without money and without price."⁷

At the same meeting, Carl also explained why farmers of the country needed better credit as badly as they needed agricultural and economic science. He stated that the current banking system in place was built up to satisfy the financial needs of urban communities with little or no special provisions for the needs of the agricultural interests

⁴ Letter from Carl Vrooman to President Woodrow Wilson, August 19, 1914, "Vrooman Collection," Box 2, Folder 3 Letter to President, McLean County Museum of History Archives.

⁵ "Vrooman to Bankers-The New Agriculture," *The Pantagraph*, July 10, 1915.

⁶ "Smith-Lever Act of 1914," The National Archives Foundation, <https://www.archivesfoundation.org/documents/smith-lever-act-1914/>, Date Accessed July 13, 2017.

⁷ "Vrooman to Bankers-The New Agriculture."

of this country. Farmers needed more than 90 days worth of credit, which was of particularly no use to the “farmer who wants to change his system from grain to livestock.” To Carl, the improvement of agriculture affected everyone and benefited everyone.⁸

Additionally, Carl urged communities to improve their roads because the “good roads movement is important to our financial well-being, to our pleasure, and of more importance to the standard of civilization.” To Carl, good roads encourage farmers and other rural residents to come into town. And when they come into town, they spend money. With good roads, productivity increases because a farmer bringing his crop to market can take bigger loads (thus making fewer trips), get there quicker, and get back to work. With poor roads, the farmer has to cut down his load, wears out his team, and wastes time. Therefore, it is in the best interest of everyone to improve the roads.⁹

Through his travels across the country, Carl learned that there was a need to put the results of the new agricultural research in a language that the typical farmer could understand and apply to his own operations.¹⁰ To meet this need, he published several pamphlets and books aimed at regular farmers in the hopes that it would help them understand the changing technologies and also help them get the most out of their farms.

In 1916, he wrote a pamphlet called *Grain Farming in the Corn Belt with Live Stock as a Side Line*. Through this, Carl expressed most of his big ideas on agriculture. It was also written to suggest to “the farmer whose soil has been run down by continuous grain farming” in the corn belt of the Midwest that there were methods which they could employ to increase the production of their farms. Methods such as raising livestock, using lime to fertilize the soil, and crop rotation were listed. Vrooman was pretty hard on traditional farmers who simply relied on the weather and planted grain year after year. He accused them of mortgaging the future of their children by their shortsighted ideas. On his own land he demanded that his tenants plant alfalfa as a means of recharging the soil. If they ignored this, they found themselves put off the land. This pamphlet was so simply written and in such demand that nearly one million copies were printed and distributed across the country.¹¹

Julia and Carl were both known for their writing. Together, they co-authored a book on travel titled *The Lure and Lore of Travel* (1914), which gained some public attention. It was based upon their experiences traveling abroad. Julia also wrote a kind of political whodunit novel about life in Washington D.C., *The High Road to Honor* (1924), which was reviewed widely and favorably. One reviewer said that guessing which actual politicians were models for her novel might match the current craze for the new rage of the crossword puzzle.

Carl was not just involved in improving agriculture in the United States; he was also involved in helping provide much needed food to the war-torn Allied nations of Europe that had been already been at war for three years. A few weeks prior to the United States’ entry into World War I on April 6, 1917, the Federal Government began making preparations and urging its citizens to begin preparing for war. In March of 1917, Charles

⁸ “Vrooman Talks Marketing at National Conference,” *The Pantagraph*, December 2, 1915.

⁹ “Happenings in Lincoln—Vrooman Talks Good Roads,” *The Pantagraph*, May 1, 1916.

¹⁰ Roland White. “Carl Vrooman Biography Good,” unknown newspaper. Carl Vrooman file, McLean County Museum of History Archives

¹¹ Roland White. “Carl Vrooman Biography Good,” *The Pantagraph*, October 9, 1977.

Lanthrop Pack, president of the American Forestry Association, organized the National Emergency Food Garden Commission. It was this commission that organized and implemented the war garden program in the United States. Carl was a member of this seven man commission that was charged with instructing the public on how to “get the most out of the back yard or vacant lot gardening.”¹²

The main feature of the work of the National Emergency Food Garden Commission was to supply thousands of newspapers across the country with articles on how to start a garden and good gardening practices. Topics of the articles included everything from seed selection to cultivation of vegetables, harvesting, and preservation. The commission also furnished an eight-page booklet called *The Food Garden Primer* which gave all the information that the novice gardener would need to be successful.¹³

The war garden program was designed to appeal to the patriotism and practicality of the American people and to convince as many as possible to become partly self-sufficient by planting their own gardens, and canning and drying the produce that could not be used immediately. This movement also called for gardens to be created where they had not been previously, mainly in cities. Gardens were planted in both public and private spaces across the country. In every back lot, nook, and cranny gardens were planted. The food that was produced by these gardens was used to create a surplus so that other food grown could be sent to feed the soldiers fighting the war and the millions of starving Europeans affected by the war. This was also a way that people on the home front could feel like they were contributing to the war effort in some way. The National Emergency Food Garden Commission originally called for one million gardens to be planted. By the end of World War I, over five million gardens had been created across the nation.¹⁴

The message of the National Emergency Food Garden Commission particularly targeted women. In addition to growing food in war gardens for their families, citizens were urged to cut back on certain food items too. The phrase, “Food will win the war,” was coined by the newly formed United States Food Administration. Herbert Hoover, future thirty-first president of the United States, headed the newly formed administration which immediately began a campaign to ask U.S. citizens to voluntarily cut back on meat, fat, sugar, and wheat so that it could be sent to war-torn Europe and helped feed American soldiers.¹⁵ It was the responsibility and patriotic duty of women, who were primarily at home, to make these cuts.¹⁶

Carl continued to travel throughout the country to promote the establishment of war gardens, encourage farmers to increase food production, and to urge citizens to conserve food. On one such trip, Carl met with representatives of the Mississippi and Tennessee State Departments of Agriculture on how to organize parties to canvas the farming districts to make sure all the farmers knew how important it was for them to increase

¹² “Expert Garden Advice To Be Given In Pantagraph,” *The Pantagraph*, March 23, 1917

¹³ The International Syndicate, “Food F.O.B. the Kitchen Door: By Means of a Million Gardens—How The National Food Garden Commission Will Help the Nation’s Food Supply—The New Organization at Work,” June 30, 1917. <http://www.cityfarmer.info/2013/01/03/1917-a-million-gardens-how-the-national-emergency-food-garden-commission-will-help-the-nations-food-supply/>, Date Accessed July 23, 2017.

¹⁴ Pack, Charles Lathrop. *War Gardens Victorious* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1919) 15.

¹⁵ Tori Avery, “Discover the History of Meatless Mondays,” *The History Kitchen*, <http://www.pbs.org/food/the-history-kitchen/history-meatless-mondays/>, Date Accessed July 23, 2017.

¹⁶ Ida Clyde Clark. *American Women and the World War*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918) Chapter 5, <https://net.lib.byu.edu/estu/wwi/comment/Clarke/Clarke05.htm>, Date Accessed July 23, 2017.

production.¹⁷ A few days later, Carl presented an address to a council meeting of the General Federation of Women's Clubs in New Orleans, Louisiana on April 11, 1917, during which he stated that "for every regiment of soldiers fighting for their country there should be a regiment of women, conserving food, economizing and aiding in every way possible to solve the food problem."¹⁸ In Chicago on May 9 that same year, Carl told the women of the Preparedness League that waste was the national vice. He urged the women to "not eat any old potatoes. We need them for seed potatoes. Buy new ones if you can afford them or use rice if you cannot" and to use corn, rice, and rye whenever they could. In Carl's opinion, "waste is not only reprehensible, but it is also disloyal."¹⁹

A little over a month after the war ended, General John J. Pershing, the commander-in-chief of the American Expeditionary Forces on the Western Front in Europe, sent a letter to Carl asking him to convey to the farmers in America his and the entire U.S. armed forces profound appreciation of their patriotic service to the country and to the allied armies in the field. The letter continued by outlining all of the contributions of the American farmer to the war effort, including furnishing their full quota of fighting men, purchasing a large quantity of Liberty bonds, and most importantly increasing "their production of food crops, both last year and this by over 1,000 million bushels above normal production." Pershing closed his letter by stating that "from the day of our entering into the war, America's armies of food producers have rendered invaluable service to the allied powers by supporting the soldiers at the front thru [sic] their devoted and splendidly successful work in the fields and furrows at home."²⁰

Carl was not alone in extolling the virtues of food conservation, cultivating war gardens, and increasing food production. Julia also championed these patriotic duties in which every American, especially women, should engage in. In an undated speech, given at a meeting of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (of which Julia was an active member), Julia echoed the sentiments of Carl and many other officials of the federal government, that it was women's duty "to see to it that every atom of food that is not absolutely needed here, is conserved and not one bit is wasted." Julia stated that this was no longer a far off war, "that this is our war" and they needed to win this war. And one of the ways they would win this war was for the N.S.D.A.R. to have a voice like a trumpet, "to echo the call for an army of women to full war strength" and that it is "the patriotic duty of every American housekeeper to make every meal a testimony to the all important fact that she is doing her part towards winning the war." "Food is the supreme need of the Allies, and we women must look carefully to our dietaries, and above all things we must watch that tell-tale garbage can," she declared.²¹

Julia, who was very interested and active in philanthropic work, decided that she wanted to help with the war effort more she was on the home front. She wanted to get directly involved in war work in Europe and decided to accompany Carl on his forthcoming trip to Europe. Carl was being sent to Europe by President Wilson as a member of a special Presidential Commission whose goal was to help solve the

¹⁷ "Vrooman Working in South," *The Pantagraph*, April 9, 1917.

¹⁸ "Vrooman Gives Advice," *The Pantagraph*, April 12, 1917.

¹⁹ "Vrooman Denounces Waste," *The Pantagraph*, May 10, 1917.

²⁰ "Gen. Pershing to Farmers," *The Pantagraph*, December 13, 1918.

²¹ Julia Vrooman, undated speech given to the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution," McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

agricultural problems of the Allied nations during World War I. He traveled through Great Britain, France, and Italy. Through this study, it was determined that Europe was in desperate need of aid in the form of food not only to feed their soldiers, but the millions of civilians as well.²² Julia was an experienced traveler, having traveled extensively in Europe with her mother before her marriage, and continued to do so both with Carl or on her own at various times. She was sometimes gone for many months. Carl helped her get a ticket over to Europe and beginning on August 23, 1918 until late 1919, she worked for the Young Men's Christian Association with American soldiers at the front. When asked why she was doing this, Julia replied "I have no children. I am in perfect health. I am fortunate enough to be able to speak both French and Italian. If, instead of looking for an opportunity to get into war work, I were looking for an excuse to avoid it, I could not find one."²³

As part of her work with the Y.M.C.A., Julia formed a jazz band of soldiers of the American army of occupation in Europe to entertain and improve the morale of the troops in France, Germany, and Belgium. After the performances, she would frequently hold a dinner for the soldiers where she and her band entertained. She often provided the food from her own supplies or bought food with her own money. Julia would also hold "cocoa parties" to help Illinois soldiers fight against homesickness.²⁴ The chief difficulty which Julia encountered over and over again during her service with the Y.M.C.A. was the fact that it was very hard to keep the members of her jazz band together. Troop transfers were a common occurrence between army units. On one occasion, Julia went so far as to ask the commander of a certain unit to "transfer two of her men to a certain village so they could be near the other members of the band" to which the commander replied "that if he transferred the men to the place as she requested, they would be the only Americans at that place, for all the other soldiers of our army had been taken out of there that day."²⁵

Shortly before his return to the U.S., because of his poor health Carl resigned his position as assistant Secretary of Agriculture. It was not known what Carl was suffering from at the time but he tendered his resignation so that he could spend some time abroad until he had fully recovered. Also prior to his return to the U.S., he spent two months at the Paris Peace Conference in an unofficial capacity, returning home in April of 1919. Julia however remained overseas for several more months until December of 1919. For her efforts to keep the troops' morale high during the war, in 1921 Julia was made an honorary member of the John H. Kraus Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Bloomington, an honor of which she was very proud.

Julia was also very passionate about the idea of a World Court which later became known as the International Court of Justice. She believed this would be an agent of peace in the world and that it would eliminate war through the use of peaceful arbitration between nations. She spoke extensively in public about the fact that the idea for the court had been misinterpreted to the public by scheming politicians and that those politicians

²² "Carl Vrooman is in England," *The Daily Bulletin*, September 12, 1918.

²³ "Vroomans Abroad To Enter War Work," *Daily Pantagraph*, September 12, 1918; "Women of World War I Julia Scott Vrooman," World War I I.S.N.U. Service Questionnaire for Julia Vrooman, Dr. JoAnn Rayfield Archives Illinois State University.

²⁴ "Julia," *The Pantagraph*, November 3, 1918

²⁵ "Mrs. Vrooman and Her Jazz Band," *Daily Pantagraph*, November 28, 1919

had tried to make people believe that it would cause the United States to become entangled in foreign disputes.

After the war, Carl was chosen by the American Farm Bureau to head a relief mission to Europe. He was charged with the collection, processing, and shipment of nearly a million bushels of corn to the starving European nations of Austria, Poland, and Czechoslovakia as a gift from American farmers. For these efforts, the Polish government decorated him for this service. In 1921 he also authored the first modern farm relief bill which provided credit for the sale of farm surplus abroad. This was the first official Democratic Party farm program. While the bill received bipartisan support, passing the Senate by unanimous vote and the House by a two-thirds vote, it was “killed in conference” on the last day of the legislative session.²⁶

Julia also organized the Russian-Near East Relief carnival, which was touted as being the biggest charity event ever held in Bloomington up to that time. The carnival was held from June 29 through July 4, 1922 at “The Oaks,” (the lavish mansion and property formerly owned by local businessman, politician, and early settler Asahel Gridley) located at 301 East Grove Street and owned by Howard and Clara (Funk) Humphreys.²⁷

What was originally supposed to only be a four-day event was extended by two days on account of rain during the two of the days of the event. Thirty-five activities were arranged to be featured at the carnival. There was “mound dancing” on the yard by the dancing quintet from I.S.N.U. and several vaudeville numbers were performed in the Majestic Theater a few blocks away. Performances were given by the band from the Soldiers and Sailors Orphans Home (known today as the Illinois Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Children’s School) and the Bloomington Municipal Band. Attendees could also enjoy dancing in an open air pavilion with music provided by George Goforth’s Orchestra. Several ice cream parlors and a Hawaiian roof garden were among other activities.²⁸ Additionally Sidney Smith, cartoonist who arose to fame in Bloomington and created the “Gumps” cartoon, also paid the carnival a visit. Smith presented a demonstration of the art of drawing.²⁹ It was reported that the entire lawn of “The Oaks” was covered by “side-shows and booths.” A wide variety of food and drinks were sold and items were raffled. Candy girls dressed in “brilliant costumes fluttered about the lawns” and balloon sellers filled the air with their wares.³⁰ The final night of the carnival featured boxing bouts, fireworks, and a “colored minstrel show.”³¹

Thousands of tickets were sold for the relief carnival and an estimated 50,000 tickets sold over all at the gate during the four nights. Julia managed over 500 people who were part of various committees to put on this highly successful relief. It was estimated that the four day event raised over \$6,000, (which would be almost \$86,000 in 2016) which would then be forwarded to the Quakers who would then get the funds to the Near East relief organization to help needy of the Near East. *The Pantagraph* deemed the fete the most successful ever sponsored.³²

²⁶ “Carl Vrooman For Congressman 17th District,” *The Pantagraph*, October 24, 1948.

²⁷ “Relief Carnival Brought to an End,” *The Pantagraph*, July 5, 1922, 11

²⁸ “Relief Carnival To Open Tonight,” *The Pantagraph*, June 29, 1922, 7; “Thousands Visit Big Relief Fete,” *The Pantagraph*, June 30, 1922, 5

²⁹ “Relief Carnival To Open Tonight.”

³⁰ “Thousands Visit Big Relief Fete.”

³¹ “Battle Royal to be Staged,” *The Pantagraph*, July 4, 1922, 6

³² “Relief Carnival To Open Tonight;” “Relief Carnival Brought to an End.”

Carl and Julia continued to have very active lives after World War I. Carl unsuccessfully attempted to enter politics again in 1946 and 1948 by running for U.S. Representative for the 17th District in Illinois (which included McLean County). His opponent, Republican Leslie Arends, had held the seat since 1934 and decidedly defeated Carl both times.³³

The couple also had a very deep religious faith and were active members of Second Presbyterian Church in Bloomington. Carl was a member of the original Lions Club of Bloomington, an honorary vice-president for life of the McLean County Historical Society. He belonged to the Masons and the Order of the Eastern Star, was elected president of the Community Players Theater in 1923, and served as public relations and information chairman of the McLean County chapter of the American Red Cross in 1947, among other things.³⁴ Julia was an active member of the Federation of Women's Club and was elected president of the 17th District Federation of Women's Clubs in 1922.³⁵ She also continued her philanthropic work and played the role of hostess during the many parties she and Carl held at their mansion on Taylor Street. She and Carl often opened up their home up to the community. Many formal dances of Illinois Wesleyan University fraternities and sororities and tea parties were held at their home. During World War II, they sectioned off the third floor of their house as apartments for soldiers and their families. The house was also used a hospital during the Flu Pandemic of 1918-1919.

Sadly, shortly before their 70th wedding anniversary, Carl died suddenly at the age of 93 on April 8, 1966. Julia would go on to live another fifteen years. On her 100th birthday, she stated that she never knew a couple that was closer than she and Carl. She believed that they lived a marvelous and interesting life wherever they happened to be located. She attributed the secret to their life together to their mutual strong belief in religion.³⁶ Julia passed away quietly in the family home on Taylor Street on May 30, 1981. She was 104 years old. Her will cited 118 beneficiaries of her estate that was estimated as being worth \$1.5 million in personal property and \$2.75 million in real estate. She was buried next to her husband and other members of her family in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.

By: Candace Summers, 2008; revisions and additions 2017.

³³ "Meet the Candidates," *The Pantagraph*, October 21, 1948.

³⁴ "Carl Vrooman, 93, Civic Leader, Dies," *The Pantagraph*, April 9, 1966; "Carl Vrooman Publicity Man for Red Cross," *The Pantagraph*, April 20, 1947.

³⁵ "Mrs. Vrooman Is Federation Head," *The Pantagraph*, April 19, 1922.

³⁶ "Mrs. Julia Vrooman looks at 'her' century," *The Pantagraph*, October 3, 1976