

Charles Sperry Kirkpatrick (1879-1971)

Much of the information about Charles Kirkpatrick's life comes from an autobiographical interview that was conducted at 10:00 a.m. on December 19, 1952 at the administration building for the Bloomington Board of Education, and a variety of manuscripts that were written by an unknown author (many of which are of an autobiographical nature, so presumably may have been written by Kirkpatrick himself). Though these resources contain factual information, a good portion of the dates are wrong and some of the facts have been exaggerated—which seems indicative of the eccentric personality of Charles Kirkpatrick.

Charles Sperry Kirkpatrick was born on January 6, 1879 in Bloomington, Illinois. He was the fourth of five children born to John and Sylvia (Sperry) Kirkpatrick.¹ He had three older sisters (Mary, Ira, and Ora) and a younger brother, Edward.² At the time of Charles' birth, the family lived at 705 E. Douglas Street in Bloomington.³

Kirkpatrick's father, John, was born in Adams County, Ohio, and was the youngest of eight children. John's father, John Sr., was originally from Virginia. He moved his family to Adams County where he worked as a tailor.⁴ John Sr. died in 1852, leaving his wife, Mary, a widow with eight children to raise. Mary decided to move her family to Illinois shortly thereafter. The family came with a group of fellow residents of Adams County, who settled in the northwestern part of the McLean County near Oak Grove (which today would have been near the town of Carlock). John Jr. was about eight years old when the family came to McLean County. According to Kirkpatrick family history, John Jr. began to work to assist in the support of his family. While construction of the Illinois Central Railroad was occurring through McLean County, John Jr. obtained a job with the railroad company in 1853 (he would have been nine years old at the time). It is not known exactly what kind of work he engaged in with the railroad.⁵

In 1861, at the age of 17, John Jr. moved to Iowa where he engaged in farming. It was in Iowa that he met Sylvia Sperry.⁶ Sylvia was born and raised in New York before becoming a teacher in Iowa.⁷ John Jr. and Sylvia became engaged not long after they met, and later married in Barton, Iowa.⁸

The couple continued to live in Iowa until August 1873. According to a biography about John Jr., he decided to sell his agricultural interests in Iowa and move the family back to McLean County, Illinois.⁹ Around 1875, John Jr. and Mary then relocated their family to Bloomington,

¹ "Charles S. Kirkpatrick, 92, longtime civic leader, dies," *Pantagraph*, June 21, 1971.

² S.J. Clarke Publishing Company. *The Biographical Record of McLean County, Illinois Illustrated*. (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1899) 642; "Col. J.H. Kirkpatrick, Dean of Illinois Auctioneers, Dead," *Pantagraph*, February 10, 1919.

³ *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1878-1879*, 101.

⁴ *Ibid*; Unknown Author. "Origin and Growth of Bloomington's First Complete Home Furnishing Store," February 18, 1958, 2, Kirkpatrick Collection, Box 1, Folder 28, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

⁵ Unknown author, undated. "Record of Chas S. Kirkpatrick," *Kirkpatrick Collection*, Box 1, Folder 13, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives, 1; S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 641-642.

⁶ *Ibid*. 642.

⁷ A.R. Evans and Charles Kirkpatrick, "Biography of Charles S. Kirkpatrick as related by him," December 19, 1952, 1, Kirkpatrick Collection, Box 1, Folder 7, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

⁸ *Ibid*. 1.

⁹ S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 641.

settling in a house located at 705 E. Douglas Street.¹⁰ In about 1887, the family moved to a house located at 611 W. North Street (renamed Monroe Street in 1897).¹¹

John Jr. then decided to take up auctioneering because of the “practical knowledge he gained during his agricultural career.”¹² According to his obituary, during his 50-year career as an auctioneer, he had “cried” at approximately 6,000 land and livestock sales, selling over a half million head of horses, cattle, hogs, and sheep. Kirkpatrick claimed that his father had quite a talent for auctioneering. In his autobiography, he stated that his father had won a contest for the greatest number of consecutive sales in a season, with 75 straight days of concluded auctions.¹³ Additionally, he (John Jr.) also served as president of the Illinois State Auctioneers Association for several years, as well as president of the International Auctioneers Association.¹⁴

While engaged in a successful career as an auctioneer, John Jr. also ventured into the furniture business. The Kirkpatrick family name had been connected to the furniture trade as early as 1863, when Adam Kirkpatrick (John Jr.’s brother and Charles’ uncle) operated a furniture and auction house in Bloomington. Adam started that business with Robert S. Howard, which operated until 1897.¹⁵

His brother’s success in the trade seems to have inspired John Jr. to join the new family business. In 1884, John Jr. began selling second-hand furniture in a building that was once a livery stable, located at 522 N. Main Street.¹⁶ By 1888, John Jr. had taken on Louis Howard (his future son-in-law) as a partner in the furniture business, apparently so he could have more time to focus on auctioneering.¹⁷ The firm was renamed Howard and Kirkpatrick. Due to its continued success, the business expanded in 1894. The wood-frame building that housed the business was torn down to make room for a “handsome” three-story brick building, and the business was expanded to include 524 N. Main Street (the building next door).¹⁸ By 1908, Howard and Kirkpatrick expanded again to include one floor at 520 N. Main; the two top floors of the McGregor building at 518 N. Main; one room in the Fremont-Miller building at 610 N. Main; the first floors and basements at 502, 504, and 512 N. Main; and eventually the entire building at 502 N. Main—making the Howard and Kirkpatrick furniture store “the most expansive retail front in Bloomington” at that time.¹⁹

While his father was growing the furniture business and expanding his career as an auctioneer, Charles Kirkpatrick received his education at Bloomington public schools; first by

¹⁰ *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1875*, 121.

¹¹ *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1887*, 247; *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1897*, 264.

¹² Unknown author, undated. “Col. J.H. Kirkpatrick,” *Kirkpatrick Collection*, Box 1, Folder 5, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives, 1.

¹³ Evans and Kirkpatrick, 2.

¹⁴ “Col. J.H. Kirkpatrick, Dean of Illinois Auctioneers, Dead.”

¹⁵ “Adam Kirkpatrick,” *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1866*; “R.W. Kirkpatrick,” *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1897*.

¹⁶ “John Kirkpatrick,” *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1884*; “Origin and Growth of Bloomington’s First Complete Home Furnishing Store,” 2.

¹⁷ “Origin and Growth of Bloomington’s First Complete Home Furnishing Store,” 2; “John Kirkpatrick,” *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1891*.

¹⁸ Gene Smedley, “Back Then: The ‘colonel’ led the way,” *Pantagraph*, August 29, 1999; “A Fine New Building,” *Pantagraph*, May 9, 1894.

¹⁹ “Howard & Kirkpatrick To Close Out of Business,” *Pantagraph*, January 23, 1908.

attending the Market Street School (located at the corner of Mason and West Market streets).²⁰ Kirkpatrick claimed that since the back of his family's house touched the back of the school's lot, he and his brother Edward jumped the fence each day to get to school.²¹

Kirkpatrick was evidently quite an active child. While attending Bloomington High School (located between Lee and Oak streets), he played baseball with a local club called "The Unions," and played football for the Bloomington High School (BHS) team.²² As a member of The Unions, he served as manager and played second base. However, football seems to have especially appealed to Kirkpatrick. He stated that it gave him the chance to roughhouse because he "always loved to tackle."²³ But even at this early time, football was seen to be very unsafe by some, and public outcry against it was brewing.²⁴ Unwittingly, Kirkpatrick helped add to that outcry after suffering a severe injury during a game between BHS and Illinois State Normal University (ISNU) on October 17, 1896, near the present day location of the McLean County Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument in Miller Park.²⁵

It was not uncommon during this time period for high school teams to play college teams. According to Kirkpatrick, the first half of the game was played out as normal. He played the left end position and tried to stop as many plays as he could so that the opposition could not gain much ground. It was during the second half that disaster struck. Kirkpatrick recalled that the referee had blown the whistle to start play, but only Kirkpatrick and fellow BHS player Ralph DeMange had returned to the field, in the company of all of the ISNU players. Kirkpatrick stated that the other players from BHS were off to one side arguing with the referee. Because the whistle had already been blown to begin play, the ball was kicked off. Kirkpatrick caught it and began running down the field. He stated that he managed to elude several players, but with only one other player from the BHS team on the field with him, there was no one to run interference to stop the ISNU players from tackling him. Once the pile (of which he was at the bottom) untangled itself, Kirkpatrick found he was unable to move.²⁶ He was brought back to the family home where he was examined by two Bloomington doctors. The doctors "pronounced the injury to be one of a fractured spine" (though in subsequent accounts of the incident, he described the injury as "a broken back with many vertebrae of the spine fractured").²⁷ Many years later, Kirkpatrick recalled that an additional injury was discovered (damage to his diaphragm) because "medical science had not been able to discover or reveal until 34 years after its occurrence."²⁸ He also claimed that the pain of the injury was such that he never managed to sleep again after its occurrence, though this seems highly unlikely.²⁹

²⁰ Evans and Kirkpatrick, 3; *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1895*, 51; the Market Street School later became known as Edwards School.

²¹ *Ibid.* 3; The 1895 map of the City of Bloomington does in support this story.

²² Evans and Kirkpatrick, 3.

²³ *Ibid.* 3.

²⁴ Charles Kirkpatrick, "Mythical Football Game: Illinois State Normal University vs Bloomington High School, Time of Halves – Each 33 Years With One Year Intermission, Inspiration – Injury to Charles S. Kirkpatrick," August 1, 1963, 2, *Kirkpatrick Collection*, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 3.

²⁶ "The Injured Footballist," *Pantagraph*, October 22, 1896.

²⁷ Bill Kemp, "Kirkpatrick Source of October 17 Mystery," *Pantagraph*, October 13, 2013.

²⁸ Evans and Kirkpatrick, 4.

²⁹ Kemp.

According to Kirkpatrick, he was confined to bed for over a year while the fracture healed.³⁰ Though, according to newspaper accounts, he was able to be up and around again by January 2, 1897. Kirkpatrick recalled that doctors eventually suspended him from his bedroom doorway and encased his midsection in a plaster cast (the first of many).³¹

According to Kirkpatrick, the severity of his injury motivated his father (at the time a one-term Alderman representing Ward 2 for the City of Bloomington) to introduce a resolution to the City Council in November 1897 banning football in the city.³² Kirkpatrick stated that this resolution was defeated, despite widespread public outcry for its passage.³³ However, despite his serious injury, Kirkpatrick remained supportive of the sport, later writing that his father's resolution "was defeated, as well it should have been."³⁴ Whether or not there is any truth about the attempt to ban football in Bloomington remains to be seen. The only record of this attempt comes from Kirkpatrick himself, and no other information to corroborate this story has been found.

After more than a year and a half away from school, Kirkpatrick returned to BHS (located in a new building at Monroe and Prairie streets) in January 1898, going on to graduate in 1900. After graduation, he decided that he should attend Eastman National Business College, a business school in Poughkeepsie, New York.³⁵ He recalled that the biggest motivating factor in choosing the school was that many people from McLean County had attended the school. Though, it may also have helped that some of his mother's family lived in Malone, New York, which was not far from the school. With his parents' permission, he enrolled and made his way by train to Malone on July 25, 1900. Upon his arrival, he visited with relatives for several weeks before school began on September 17. Prior to his departure, Kirkpatrick's doctor, Horace Elder, fitted him with a much sturdier steel-based jacket with arm supports to replace the plaster casts. After attending Eastman for several months, he graduated on February 5, 1901 and returned home shortly thereafter.³⁶ It was reported that he won high honors and was at the top of his class.³⁷

According to Kirkpatrick, he became idle after he returned home, as he had yet to find prospects for employment. This apparently agitated his mother, who then convinced his father that he should train Kirkpatrick to be an auctioneer. Kirkpatrick recalled that he participated in several auctions with his father coaching him from the sideline. However, after "making this tour of sales," Kirkpatrick realized that though he believed he had "the gift of gab and reasonable judgement," the job was too physically demanding for him and he could not carry on.³⁸ Kirkpatrick claimed that his decision not to follow in the footsteps of his father "grieved my mother and father very much." He stated in his autobiography that he could not reveal to anyone, especially them, just how he physically felt. Instead, Kirkpatrick turned his sights on the other

³⁰ Evans and Kirkpatrick, 5

³¹ Kemp; "Albert Kirkpatrick," *Pantagraph*, January 2, 1897.

³² "Candidates for Office," *Pantagraph*, March 12, 1897.

³³ Kirkpatrick, *Mythical Football Game*, 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 3-5.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 5.

³⁶ Evans and Kirkpatrick, 5-6; Charles Kirkpatrick, "Diary of Charles Kirkpatrick of Bloomington, II. Date From July 26 1900 To," 1-2, *Kirkpatrick Collection*, Box 1, Folder 33, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives; "Home From School," unknown, undated newspaper, pasted into the back of the "Diary of Charles Kirkpatrick of Bloomington, II."

³⁷ "Change in Old Business Firm," *Pantagraph*, June 18, 1908.

³⁸ Evans and Kirkpatrick, 5-6.

family business, the furniture store, and became the credit manager for Howard and Kirkpatrick in 1902.³⁹

Despite the physical pain Kirkpatrick claims to have suffered from, he seemed to have boundless energy. While still credit manager at the furniture store, he enrolled in Illinois Wesleyan University's law school in 1904.⁴⁰ The class was comprised of 29 students, making it one of the largest classes to have enrolled in IWU's law school at the time.⁴¹ Evidently, Kirkpatrick thought the courses would help his work as the furniture company's credit manager.⁴² While taking classes, he also joined the Phi Delta Phi legal fraternity.⁴³ However, it does not appear that Kirkpatrick graduated the law school, as he was no longer listed as a member of the class of 1907 when they graduated.⁴⁴

In January 1908, John Kirkpatrick and Louis Howard announced their intention to close the furniture business. The main reason for doing so was because of the failing health of Howard, who said he needed an occupation that afforded him more of an "outdoor life." Since Howard was set to leave the company, John Jr. would not be able to manage the store because his auctioneering interests took up all of his time.⁴⁵ So it was decided to reorganize the business into a corporation.⁴⁶ On July 1 of that year, the firm reorganized as the Howard-Kirkpatrick House Furnishing Company, with Charles' younger brother, Edward, becoming the president of the corporation and general manager of the firm, Charles the secretary-treasurer, and their father John Jr. retaining complete control of the entire stock of the company.⁴⁷

The business continued to flourish. Customers continued to come to the store from all over Central Illinois. One of the things that continued to draw customers and industry workers to the store was the trademark large red chair, which had sat in front of the store each and every day since 1888. Known as "Kirk's Chair," it was constructed by James Hughes, a cabinetmaker for the firm. Parents would bring their children to the store and place them in it so that "in after years they might say proudly that they had sat in it."⁴⁸ The chair was even borrowed for city parades and weddings. And, according to local lore, the heaviest man in the United States, Leonard "Baby" Bliss from Bloomington, as well as the tallest person in recorded history, Robert Wadlow from Alton, Illinois, sat in the chair—though not at the same time.⁴⁹ The chair is now part of the permanent collection of the McLean County Museum of History. Visitors to the museum can still sit in the chair just like the countless visitors and customers did at Howard-Kirkpatrick.

Edward and Charles continued the store's innovative business practices and made additional improvements as well. The store is credited with offering the first installment-purchasing plan in any Illinois city outside Chicago. It has also been reported that Charles was the first buyer and

³⁹ Ibid. 7.

⁴⁰ *Wesleyana, Volume II, 1905*. (Bloomington: Senior Class of the Illinois Wesleyan University, 1905), 88.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Evans and Kirkpatrick, 8.

⁴³ "Charles S. Kirkpatrick, 92, longtime civic leader, dies."

⁴⁴ *The Wesleyana, Volume III, 1907* (Bloomington: The Senior Class of the Illinois Wesleyan University, 1907), 70.

⁴⁵ "Howard & Kirkpatrick To Close Out Business."

⁴⁶ "Origin and Growth of Bloomington's First Complete Home Furnishing Store," 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 4; "Change in Old Business Firm."

⁴⁸ "Origin and Growth of Bloomington's First Complete Home Furnishing Store," 5-6.

⁴⁹ Smedley; "Record of Chas. S. Kirkpatrick;" "Origin and Growth of Bloomington's First Complete Home Furnishing Store," 5-6.

that Howard-Kirkpatrick was the first firm that ever bought any goods out of the Merchandise Mart in Chicago.⁵⁰

One of the first improvements Edward made to the newly incorporated business was the installation of indirect lighting on the first floor of the building, being among the first businesses outside of Chicago to do so.⁵¹ He was inspired to add this to the new store after a visit to the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago, which had recently opened using this technique. Additionally, the second floor of the store was used to make seven sample rooms, which could help to inspire customers on how to lay out their homes and encourage further purchases from the new Howard-Kirkpatrick House Furnishers Company.⁵²

Edward and Charles continued to successfully operate the business for almost 30 years. However, in January 1937, it was announced that the Kirkpatricks had sold the business to Chicago-based home furnishing store Leath and Company (which had previously occupied space in the Newmarket Department Store on Front and Center streets). The store then underwent significant remodeling, including a new marble front.⁵³ The name of the Kirkpatrick store was still significant to Bloomington though, and Leath's explicitly marketed itself as the "successors to Kirkpatrick's," even continuing to use "Kirk's Chair" in marketing.⁵⁴ It is not known why the brothers decided to sell the business, but Leath continued to operate the store in the exact same location, 518-524 N. Main Street, for another 49 years until a fire destroyed the downtown location in 1986.⁵⁵

Amongst all of his educational and business pursuits, Charles Kirkpatrick still found time to be a very active member of the community. In 1906, Kirkpatrick was made president of the Bloomington High School Alumni Association, despite his claim that he did not run for the position, nor attend the meeting during which time he was elected.⁵⁶ In this position, he was in charge of publishing and selling the special edition of the BHS alumni *Aegis*. His immediate project for the publication was to have a member of each BHS graduating class from 1864 to 1906 write an article for inclusion in the magazine.⁵⁷ One such notable alum that was featured was Gordon William Lillie, better known as "Pawnee Bill," a graduate of the class of 1879 who became a performer and organized traveling Wild West shows.⁵⁸ Kirkpatrick also organized the alumni banquet in June that year at the Miller Park pavilion, featuring speakers from various BHS graduating classes.⁵⁹ According to Kirkpatrick, each of the 14 speakers were instructed

⁵⁰ Smedley; Unknown author, undated. "Charles S. Kirkpatrick," 1, *Kirkpatrick Collection*, Box 1, Folder 13, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives; "Record of Chas. S. Kirkpatrick," 2.

⁵¹ "Record of Chas. S. Kirkpatrick," 2; Indirect lighting is lighting that is directed onto walls or the ceiling and not hanging or right above in the ceiling.

⁵² "Origin and Growth of Bloomington's First Complete Home Furnishing Store," 3-4; "Kirkpatrick House Furnishers Co.," *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*, 1911.

⁵³ *Origin and Growth of Bloomington's First Complete Home Furnishing Store*, 5

⁵⁴ "Advertisement for Leath's," *Pantagraph*, February 12, 1937.

⁵⁵ Steve Arney and Emilie Krebs, "Fire guts downtown building," *Pantagraph*, October 14, 1986; Leath Furniture had already expanded to a second location in Normal by the time of the fire. They continued operating out of their new building located at 1535 East College Avenue in Normal until 2007 when it closed permanently, Dave Haake, "New Leath's to open in June," *Pantagraph*, January 4, 1986; "Designed Move," *Pantagraph*, April 6, 2010.

⁵⁶ Evans and Kirkpatrick, 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 7; "Pawnee Bill Reviewed Value of Studying for BHS *Aegis*," *Pantagraph*, February 6, 1942; "The Alumni *Aegis*, 1864-1906," (Bloomington, Illinois: High School, 1906), 151, *Kirkpatrick Collection*, Box 1, Folder 24, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

⁵⁹ Evans and Kirkpatrick, 8.

personally by him to not talk more than five minutes. However, Kirkpatrick recalled that “they became reminiscent, so much so that nothing could stop them” and the banquet ended up going until 2:30 a.m. He became president of the Alumni Association again in 1930.⁶⁰

In 1917, Kirkpatrick was made chair of the entertainment committee of Bloomington Consistory Club (a booster club created in 1916 for the Scottish Rite fraternal organization), when the previous chair resigned to serve in the Navy when the United States entered World War I.⁶¹ Together with the remaining committee member, Rue Kemp, Kirkpatrick organized bi-weekly luncheons that were free to members. During those luncheons, he endeavored to find prominent men from around the state and nation to speak including Admiral Robert Coontz, commandant of the Navy Yard at Puget Sound, stage and silent film actor Raymond Hitchcock, and American composer and conductor John Phillip Sousa. Kirkpatrick served in this capacity for a decade. By the time of the last meeting of the club during his tenure, between 1,000 and 2,000 people attended the luncheons.⁶²

Kirkpatrick was a member and supporter of so many organizations and businesses throughout his lifetime that it is difficult to mention them all. However, amongst those he was involved in included being appointed to the Federal Home Loan Bank Board in Washington, D.C., serving as vice-president of the Central Illinois Hospital Association, serving as a director of the Blue Cross Plan for Hospital Care of Chicago, serving as president of the North Main Street Boosters for several years, a member of the Moose Lodge Number 475, the Barbershoppers, the American Italian Society, Masonic Lodge 435, Mahommed Shrine of Peoria, and Second Presbyterian Church. Any organization he belonged to benefited from his membership and tireless energies, despite the life-long pain he wrote that he suffered from.⁶³ Because of his involvement in numerous organizations, businesses, and activities, Kirkpatrick was recognized as a community leader.

Despite spending a great deal of time working for all of the organizations to which he belonged (in addition to his work at Howard-Kirkpatrick), he still found time to fundraise for numerous local charities. One charity that Kirkpatrick was very well known for his support of was the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (today known as the March of Dimes). Beginning in 1934, the fight against poliomyelitis (also known as infantile paralysis, or polio) was commonly associated with the annual Birthday Balls held each January 30 in honor of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s birthday (who had contracted polio in 1921 at the age of 39). These lively events were initially designed to raise funds to support the Warm Springs Georgia Foundation (which supported a spa in Warm Springs, Georgia where FDR and many other victims of polio received treatment) and were organized in cities throughout the United States. These parties were unique in their appeal to ordinary citizens to join the campaign to find a cure for this dreaded disease.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Evans and Kirkpatrick, 15.

⁶¹ Ibid, 8.

⁶² Ibid. 9-10; “Armistice Day Luncheon Honoring John Phillip Sousa,” *Pantagraph*, November 9, 1927; “Rear Admiral Coontz Will Address Masons,” *Pantagraph*, September 10, 1927.

⁶³ “Charles S. Kirkpatrick, 92, longtime civic leader, dies;” “Record of Chas. S. Kirkpatrick,” 3; Evans and Kirkpatrick, 13; Karen Moen, “Memorial Donations to BPL enjoyed by All,” Bloomington Public Library, November 2012, Volume 6, Issue 6, 1, *Kirkpatrick Collection*, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives; Brigid McBride, Finding Aid for *Kirkpatrick Collection* (2009), 2, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

⁶⁴ “Origin of Our Name,” March of Dimes, <https://www.marchofdimes.org/mission/eddie-cantor-and-the-origin-of-the-march-of-dimes.aspx>, Accessed September 18, 2019; “FDR Birthday,” Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/fdr-birthday>, Accessed September 18, 2019.

The first Birthday Ball was held in 1934 with 4,376 communities (including Bloomington) joining in 600 separate celebrations that raised over one million dollars for Warm Spring. Future Birthday Balls continued to raise about \$1,000,000 per year, with the contributions split between Warm Springs and the local communities where the events were held.⁶⁵ Kirkpatrick was a member of the general organizing committee for this inaugural event, and according to his biography, he designed the theme and decoration for the first Birthday Ball held in Bloomington, and would do so for each birthday ball held through 1940. The theme for the 1934 Birthday Ball was “Birthday Rose Garden,” and the party was held in the Coliseum.⁶⁶

In 1938, Roosevelt created the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, which was soon known as the “March of Dimes,” thanks to radio comedian Eddie Cantor when he urged Americans to donate loose change to the cause in “a march of dimes to reach all the way to the White House.”⁶⁷ Now known simply as the March of Dimes, the charity would go on to help fund Jonas Salk’s development of a polio vaccine in 1955, and continues its work today to improve the health of mothers and children.⁶⁸

The first Birthday Ball to be held in the Scottish Rite Temple (today the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts) was in 1937, which apparently Kirkpatrick managed to plan and supervise while confined to the hospital after suffering an injury that was the result of falling on icy steps.⁶⁹ To get a sense of how elaborate the decorations were that Kirkpatrick planned for each Birthday Ball, during the 1938 Presidential Birthday Ball, the theme was the “Duchess County of State of New York” (the home county of the Roosevelts). The event featured a pageant for Queen of the Ball (with the winner receiving a “huge and gorgeous” bouquet of violets from Dutchess County); all 13 posts in the ballroom were decorated as trees; the ceiling had the 20 townships making up Dutchess County outlined in red (with 20 more blue dots representing towns within the county and hanging cardboard signs noting each one); the west wall of the ballroom had a 75 foot “Hudson River” decoration (with additional decorations representing birds, boats, and piers); a 25 foot long drapery extended behind the platform, which the Queen of the Ball was crowned on (complete with a sign labeling it as the Roosevelt’s estate, Crum Elbow); 56 apples hung to denote it was the President’s 56th birthday; and finally, three people costumed as a porter from the Abraham Lincoln train, a stewardess from American Airlines, and a worker with Hudson Day Line Steam Ship Company, who took the attending guests on a “trip” to Dutchess county when they entered.⁷⁰

In 1939, Kirkpatrick was asked to organize and lead the McLean County chapter for the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. Under his leadership, the chapter organized and implemented the annual Birthday Balls, “March of Dimes” campaigns (which encouraged the

⁶⁵ “March of Dimes To Raise Funds for Crippled,” *Pantagraph*, January 17, 1939.

⁶⁶ Charles Kirkpatrick, *Identification of Charles S. Kirkpatrick with “March of Dimes” Campaigns and McLean County, Illinois, Chapter for Infantile Paralysis*, 1.

⁶⁷ “FDR’s Birthday.”

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* “Who we are,” March of Dimes, <https://www.marchofdimes.org/mission/who-we-are.aspx>, Accessed September 1, 2019

⁶⁹ Unknown author, undated. “Identification of Charles S. Kirkpatrick with March of Dimes Campaigns and McLean County, Illinois, Chapter for Infantile Paralysis,” *Kirkpatrick Collection*, Box 1, Folder 14, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives, 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 1; Unknown author, undated. “McLean County Illinois Fifth Presidential Birthday Ball Honoring the Fifty-Sixth Birthday of the President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, for the Benefit of Those Afflicted with Infantile Paralysis,” *Kirkpatrick Collection*, Box 1, Folder 14, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives, 1-3.

public to donate dimes that were then sent to President Roosevelt on his birthday), raised funds to send local doctors and nurses to receive special training on new treatments for polio patients, created a special local fund that victims of polio could use to pay for their treatment (regardless of ability to repay or if they had insurance), and more.⁷¹ In Kirkpatrick's opinion, how could money "be better spent than to use it for the alleviation of the suffering of others."⁷²

Kirkpatrick was the chairman of the McLean County chapter until 1950 when he stepped down. In honor of all of his efforts, contributions, and fundraising for the local chapter, Kirkpatrick was named Chairman Emeritus and received a gold pin and certificate of appreciation from the regional director of the foundation.⁷³ Though he stepped down from leadership, Kirkpatrick continued to be a member of the chapter and financial contributor to the organization for many more years.

After Kirkpatrick retired from the furniture store in 1937, he was free to spend his time and wealth as he chose and continued to grow his reputation as an important local philanthropist. After the United States entered World War II in December 1941, Kirkpatrick found many new causes to contribute towards, chief among them the American Red Cross. He was tasked with organizing the Red Cross "Kick-Off" meeting to launch their fundraising drives in response to the United States' entry into World War II.⁷⁴ Additionally, each year of the war, Kirkpatrick was in charge of publicity for the fund drives, and was the chairman of the drives for all 31 of the townships in McLean County. This involved him designing new incentives and public events to draw attention to the drives each year. And each year he introduced more innovations to keep events fresh and participation high.⁷⁵ In 1942, he conceived of the "Red Cross Light of Honor," which involved installing signs with the name of each township that had met their quota, in order of doing so, to street light posts on the east side of North Main Street, beginning at Front Street.⁷⁶ This practice continued as a way to honor towns meeting their quota throughout the war.⁷⁷ In 1943, a large bell (donated by the Chicago & Alton Railroad) was added to the second floor balcony on the Main Street side of the McLean County Courthouse (now the McLean County Museum of History), which was rung each time a town met its fundraising quota.⁷⁸ In 1944, the bell was replaced by a diesel train whistle, which was blown to start the drive and again as each township met their quota. Supposedly, the whistle could be heard for miles around.⁷⁹ Additionally, in 1944, Charles arranged for certificates to be awarded to the first three townships that met their fundraising quota. For the fourth and final War Drive, Kirkpatrick out did himself

⁷¹ "March of Dimes To Raise Funds for Crippled;" "Polio Chapter Will Pay Anyone's Cost," *Pantagraph*, August 4, 1949.

⁷² Charles Kirkpatrick, "Polio Ward Drama, Editorial Page, *Pantagraph*, Bloomington, Illinois November 10, 1949, *Kirkpatrick Collection*, Box 1, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

⁷³ "County Polio Chapter Honors Kirkpatrick," *Pantagraph*, May 31, 1950.

⁷⁴ Unknown author, unknown date. "Connection of Charles S. Kirkpatrick with the McLean County, Illinois, Red Cross Financial War Fund Drives in World War II," *Kirkpatrick Collection*, Box 1, Folder 10, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives, 1; "Red Cross Launches War Relief Campaign," *Pantagraph*, December 18, 1941.

⁷⁵ "County's Quota in Red Cross Drive \$82,500," *Pantagraph*, February 12, 1944; "Connection of Charles S. Kirkpatrick with the McLean County, Illinois, Red Cross Financial War Fund Drives in World War II," 1.

⁷⁶ "Red Cross Honor Roll Opened on Main Street," *Pantagraph*, January 7, 1942.

⁷⁷ "Connection of Charles S. Kirkpatrick with the McLean County, Illinois, Red Cross Financial War Fund Drives in World War II," 1-4.

⁷⁸ "Connection of Charles S. Kirkpatrick with the McLean County, Illinois, Red Cross Financial War Fund Drives in World War II," 2; "Who'll Be First on 'Light of Honor' Roll?," *Pantagraph*, March 11, 1943.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 2.

yet again—this time by arranging for the installation of a six-foot tall rooster in place of the train whistle, with a sound system to make it crow, which, again, could be heard for miles.⁸⁰ To honor the first three townships that met their quotas, a public event was organized with Captain Maurice Britt (a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient), who was given the honor of pressing the button to make the rooster crow three times in honor of Anchor, Cropsey, and Allin townships.⁸¹ Throughout all of the four Red Cross War Fund Drives, each and every town completed or surpassed their quotas, thanks in part to Kirkpatrick’s leadership and zeal for fundraising.⁸²

His work to support the war effort did not end with the Red Cross, however. In his biography, Kirkpatrick claims to have “arranged or participated in War Bond parades, Army, Navy, WAC, and Red Cross parades during World War II, as well as the famous NRA parades,” though he did not elaborate on his involvement with these parades.⁸³ He certainly did have a significant involvement in a meeting of 170 Illinois bankers and civic leaders on July 29, 1942. The meeting was to coordinate efforts to raise \$3 billion each month in war bond sales, to help sustain the American war effort.⁸⁴ Kirkpatrick arranged the decorations to “[see] to it that posters on the walls carried reminders of the task ahead.”⁸⁵ In 1943, Kirkpatrick helped to organize the “Let Freedom Ring Parade,” held to celebrate the successful completion of the Third War Bond Drive.⁸⁶ The event was held on October 8, 1943, featuring units from the Army, Navy, Illinois State Militia, Civil Air Patrol, as well as city and state police, and veterans. The centerpiece of the parade was a “mammoth” float carrying a large bell and banner with the slogan “Let Freedom Ring.”⁸⁷ An additional feature included a parachute bomb with a United States flag attached to it that was fired from the top of the county courthouse. The person who found the bomb and flag after it landed won \$10 in war savings stamps by bringing it to the *Pantagraph* office.⁸⁸ The event continued late into the night, concluding with a drill demonstration and a demonstration of Wilson Packing Company’s horses and wagon.⁸⁹

Following the end of the war, Kirkpatrick continued fundraising for a variety of local organizations. One particular organization he appears to have had a fondness for was the Pearl Harbor Chapter of the American War Mothers.⁹⁰ According to Kirkpatrick, he was made an “Honorary War Mother” by the Pearl Harbor Chapter of Bloomington in recognition of his efforts to help the group raise \$1,400 for a reception room at the Dwight Veterans Hospital in

⁸⁰ Ibid. 3; “Rooster Heralds Victory News,” *Pantagraph*, March 16, 1945.

⁸¹ Ibid. 3-4; “Hero Pushes A Button,” *Pantagraph*, March 7, 1945.

⁸² “Connection of Charles S. Kirkpatrick with the McLean County, Illinois, Red Cross Financial War Fund Drives in World War II,” 5.

⁸³ Evans and Kirkpatrick, 14.

⁸⁴ “Bankers, Civic Leaders Launch War Bond Drive,” *Pantagraph*, July 30, 1942.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “Let Freedom Ring Parade Held in Bloomington, Illinois, October 8, 1943,” 1-2, *Kirkpatrick Collection*, Box 1, Folder 10, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ “Retriever of Flag to Win War Stamps,” *Pantagraph*, October 4, 1943.

⁸⁹ “Let Freedom Ring Parade Held in Bloomington, Illinois, October 8, 1943,” 1-2.

⁹⁰ The American War Mothers was a national organization founded in 1917 and incorporated by act of Congress in 1925. It is a perpetual patriotic, non-profit, non-political, non-sectarian, non-partisan organization whose members are mothers of children who have served or are serving in the U.S. Armed Services during a time of conflict, “American War Mothers: Topeka Chapter, records,” Kansas Historical Society, <https://www.kshs.org/archives/40122>, Accessed September 19, 2019.

Dwight, Illinois.⁹¹ According to an article in the *Pantagraph*, Kirkpatrick was only the third man in the United States to have been given such an honor.⁹² Kirkpatrick continued fundraising for the organization by leading the campaign to raise \$3,600 to create and install a drinking fountain to honor of McLean County's World War II dead. The fountain was dedicated on October 19, 1948 and was placed on the east side of the county courthouse. The fountain still exists today and was brought back into working order in 2013.⁹³ Kirkpatrick was honored by the War Mothers once again in 1950, when members of the local chapter presented him with a gold medal and citation "for all that he has done for the Pearl Harbor Chapter."⁹⁴

Kirkpatrick continued sporadic philanthropic work throughout the rest of his life, such as the donation of a statue he owned entitled, "Her First Sorrow." He picked up the statue at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair and donated it to Withers Public Library (today Bloomington Public Library) in 1964.⁹⁵ He also made a \$10,000 donation to Illinois Wesleyan University in 1963, after receiving a list of school accomplishments that specifically highlighted the work his brother Edward's wife, Melba, had done for the school.⁹⁶

Charles S. Kirkpatrick died on June 20, 1971 at the Mennonite Hospital where he had been a patient for some time. He was 92 years old at the time of his death. He was not only remembered for his support of dozens of local charities, but his support for local sports too. Upon Kirkpatrick's death, Fred Young, sports columnist for the *Pantagraph*, remembered the "staunch supporter of all manly athletic contests" by saying that "he [Kirkpatrick] felt that sports makes a real contribution to a better community and nation."⁹⁷ Kirkpatrick's funeral was held at Metzler Memorial Home with Dr. Robert Youngs officiating, and he was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.⁹⁸ "Despite having suffered the greatest injury in a game between schools in America ever befell a football player" and never "disclosing his true condition either to his family or to the public," Kirkpatrick certainly made something of himself and became one of the most generous and well-known members of the community.⁹⁹

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⁹¹ Evans and Kirkpatrick, 14-15; "Benefit Game Nets \$155 to War Mothers," *Pantagraph*, July 26, 1946.

⁹² "Pearl Harbor War Mothers Honor Charles Kirkpatrick," *Pantagraph*, September 6, 1946.

⁹³ Bill Kemp, "Fountain a Reminder of American War Mothers' Work," *Pantagraph*, October 6, 2013.

⁹⁴ "Mothers' Honor Kirkpatrick," *Pantagraph*, April 18, 1950.

⁹⁵ Karen Moen, "Memorials, Donations to BPL Enjoyed by All," *Bloomington Public Library Newsletter*, vol 6, no 6, November 2012, 2, Kirkpatrick Collection, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

⁹⁶ "Gives \$10,000 to IWU," *Pantagraph*, August 1, 1963.

⁹⁷ "Young's yarns," *Pantagraph*, June 21, 1971.

⁹⁸ "Charles S. Kirkpatrick, 92, longtime civic leader, dies."

⁹⁹ Unknown author, unknown date. "Salient Points in Career of Charles S. Kirkpatrick, Bloomington, Illinois, since sustaining injury in football game between Normal University and Bloomington High School on Saturday, October 17, 1896," *Kirkpatrick Collection*, Box 1, Folder 13, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives, 1.