

Frances Harriet Rowell Ela (1835-1924) and George Porter Ela (1832-1898)

Frances Harriet Rowell was born on November 15, 1835 in Waterford, Vermont. She was one of four children born to Guy and Clarissa (Rankin) Rowell. Her father was a farmer in the area. Before her mother Clarissa married, she and her sisters Melinda, Harriet, Mabina, and Persis Rankin were school teachers in the area around Littleton, New Hampshire.¹ The Rowells and the Rankins were very prominent families and some of the earliest settlers in New England. Her paternal grandfather Daniel Rowell served in the New Hampshire militia during the Revolutionary War.² Her maternal grandfather David Rankin was a general during the Revolutionary War and commanded military forces from New Hampshire as well.

When Frances, (known as “Hat” or “Hattie” to most of her friends and family) was very young, she and her family moved to Littleton, New Hampshire, located about 15 miles away from where she was born. It was in Littleton where she received her primary education at the village school. She then went on to attend the academy at McIndoes Falls in Vermont. McIndoes Falls Academy opened in 1853 and had originally been an all-male school until shortly before Hattie began to attend.³ According to school records, Hattie studied in the classical department during the 1854-1855 school year.⁴ After studying there for a few years, she completed the courses necessary to become a teacher like her mother before her. After graduating from the academy, she began teaching school in Littleton and the surrounding areas for the next eleven years. It was while attending McIndoes Falls Academy that she met her future husband George Porter Ela.

George Porter Ela was born on July 13, 1832 in Lisbon, New Hampshire. He was one of seven children born to Cyrus and Elizabeth (Ela) Ela. Like Hattie, George was a member of a prominent local family. The Ela family had settled in New England beginning in 1677 with Israel Ela of Haverhill, Massachusetts.⁵ Members of his family also fought in the Revolutionary War. His father was a farmer and George received his early education in the district schools of Lisbon and Littleton. George then went on to attend McIndoes Falls Academy where he studied surveying and civil engineering.

After graduation, he also taught school in the area around Lisbon, NH and remained there until the spring of 1858. It was at this time that he decided to move west to Illinois because of his “love of land and a desire for adventure.” Also, George probably knew there would be ample amounts of work in the west since he was a trained surveyor and engineer. Hattie, having no such desire for adventure, remained in Littleton where she continued to teach school.⁶ This did not mean the end of their relationship however. Their relationship, which began in school, would continue to grow even with George residing in Illinois. It was George’s hope that once he

¹ James R. Jackson. *History of Littleton New Hampshire in Three Volumes, Volume II.* (Cambridge: The University Press of Cambridge, Mass., 1905). 430

² *The Biographical Record of McLean County, Illinois Illustrated.* “George P. Ela” (Chicago: The S.J. Clark Publishing Company, 1899). 487

³ “Death Summons Mrs. Geo. P. Ela,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, January 11, 1924

⁴ Dave Warden. “McIndoes Falls Academy listing of trustees, teachers and students academic years ending 1854-1937.” http://www.nekg-vt.com/schools/school_mcindoe.htm#top

⁵ *The Biographical Record of McLean County*, 487

⁶ Kimberly Martin. *What Dreadful Times These Are: The Civil War Letters of Frances Harriet Rowell, 1861-1862.* (Master’s Thesis, *Illinois State University*, August 1995) 2

established himself in Illinois, that he would be able to send for Hattie to join him and they would be united in marriage.⁷

The relationship between George and Hattie continued to grow through letter writing. At first, it was a monthly correspondence with each one writing to the other about what was going on in their lives (people they knew, work, family, etc...). This correspondence grew more frequent as their relationship intensified, with them writing to each other at least once a week.

George first arrived in Pekin, Illinois in the spring of 1858.⁸ He came west with two of Hattie's uncles, Richard and Franklin Rowell. In a letter he wrote to Hattie describing his journey west, he stated that his trip was as "pleasant as could be expected," though he had never been so tired in his life from this long journey. He also tried to describe the landscape to her but stated that "any description that I am able to give of the appearance of the Prairie would convey but a faint idea of them. They eye must see for itself before anything like this can be formed in the imagination."⁹

While in Pekin, George engaged in a number of occupations including teaching school and "railroad bridging." Even after just spending a short time in Illinois, it is clear that he had a strong desire for Hattie to move west to be with him. In a letter to Hattie on May 9 of that year, he stated that "it is true that my expenses have been more in some respects than they probably will be for five years to come, but there may be new ways for money that will compensate for those cut off. Would it not then be wrong in me to ask any one to share such a pittance as I now possess?"¹⁰ Alas, Hattie's response to him would be "no." It was not an indefinite "no," but she felt that it would not be prudent for them to marry at that time, and that at "some other time if we continue to think as we do now, we can do whatever we think best."¹¹ For the time being, their relationship would have to continue through the letters they wrote to each other. These letters were a source of great joy for the young couple, especially for George being that he was so far away from most of his friends and family.

George continued living in Pekin for a few months after which time he moved to Hudson, Illinois where he continued work as a teacher until May of 1859. It was then that he decided to finally settle in Bloomington.¹²

Upon his arrival in Bloomington, he opened an office on the southwest corner of Main and Front Streets where he worked as a surveyor and civil engineer. In his letters back to Hattie, he described the surveying work he was engaged in. He told her that surveying in Illinois was much different than it was back in New England. He stated that the lands were

"originally laid out in tracts one mile square called sections. These sections are subdivided into divisions less than 1/16th of 40 acres. Then the law of the state makes it necessary to have the same surveyed, platted and recorded, which Plat must show the size and locality of every lot in a section."

⁷ Martin, 3

⁸ "The Hand of Death: Sudden Passing of George P. Ela the Well Known Surveyor," *The Daily Bulletin*, February 6, 1898

⁹ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, May 9, 1858 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

¹⁰ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, May 9, 1858

¹¹ Martin, 3-4 and George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, May 9, 1858

¹² *The Biographical Record of McLean County*, 486

The price of the work he did varied from five to fifty dollars per section according to the number of lots in each section and the amount of time he spent on surveying the sections. George told Hattie that in one particular section he had fifty-four lots to survey, which he charged \$1.00 per lot.¹³ He also said that while this work was very laborious and time consuming, he was not homesick and had “no reason to complain of the west” except for the fact that his work sometimes made him “shake.”¹⁴

As a surveyor, George would have to perform his work no matter what the weather was like or what the conditions of the landscape were that he had to survey. Often times, George would have to perform his work in the swampy sloughs of the prairie (which were most likely filled with mosquitoes), traverse “mud holes” (which were quite different from the firm, sterile soil of New England and as George described them, a person must see the “thing itself before a full conception takes place¹⁵), in the cold rain of the early spring, or the extreme heat of the summer such as when he would go to Southern Illinois for survey work as well. Because of this, George would often contract the “shakes” (malaria) or “ague” (fever). George even wrote to Hattie that because of his own personal experiences with the “shakes” and “ague,” that other people he knew who suffered from the same maladies, would benefit from his own personal experiences with these ailments and possibly get well faster than he did.¹⁶

Hattie’s letters to George were filled with news from home including her daily activities and also questions about how George was doing in the west. It was Hattie’s hope that their correspondence would help them keep some sense of normalcy in their relationship and that they should “try & be punctual in [their] intercourse, leest there might arise a feeling of neglect— which [they] ever should guard against.”¹⁷ She wrote about the students in her schools, family and friends, gossip from around town, and even the books that she read. She also inquired about George’s life in the west and whether he fancied “Suckerdom” (referring to living in Illinois) and whether or not he had “shaken off any of [his] Yankeeism yet?”¹⁸

Hattie was also very candid with her opinion in her letters to George even discussing politics. She was a Democrat and ardent supporter of Stephen Douglas even though as a woman, she did not have the right to vote. She even wrote one letter to George several months before the election of 1860 on “Stephen Douglas” letterhead showing her support for the “Little Giant.”¹⁹ George, a staunch Republican and ardent supporter of Abraham Lincoln, responded to Hattie’s letter by stating that he considered the election of “Honest-Old Abe certain if the Northeastern States do their duty in the same ratio as Illinois.”²⁰

Up to this point, their long distance courtship was uneventful. However, this would change dramatically with the outbreak of the United States Civil War and would have a dramatic

¹³ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, June 29, 1859 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

¹⁴ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, June 29, 1859

¹⁵ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, May 5, 1861 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

¹⁶ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, September 11, 1859 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

¹⁷ Frances Harriet Rowell to George Ela, January 28, 1859 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

¹⁸ Frances Harriet Rowell to George Ela, January 28, 1859

¹⁹ Frances Harriet Rowell to George Ela, August 23, 1860 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

²⁰ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, August 26, 1860 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

impact on their relationship to come. On April 12, 1861, the U.S. Civil War began when “Confederate forces fired upon the Federal Forces stationed at Fort Sumter, South Carolina.” After the fort fell just two days later, President Abraham Lincoln “issued a call for 75,000 men to help put down an insurrection” on April 15.²¹ In a letter to Hattie on the 20th of April, George wrote that his brother Richard (who had accompanied George back to Illinois after his recent trip to New Hampshire earlier that year) had “volunteered in the service of the country” by joining Company K of the 8th Illinois United States Infantry. George also candidly admitted to Hattie that had his health “permitted and other affairs been in shape to leave, Dick would not have gone alone.” He continued on by saying that if he was “needed, the horrors of war will have no part in the consideration” of his decision to volunteer for the Union army.²²

At the same time, Hattie, who had not heard from George for the past three weeks, wrote to him about the palpable atmosphere back east, her anxiety over the growing conflict, and her worry that he had already joined the Union Army. In her letter, she stated that:

“War is the cry- enthusiasm the reigning power: blood shed & destruction the inevitable consequence ...all the past week the excitement has been growing deeper & deeper untill now it seems to have reveled its climax & all await the fearful result of the preparations to harshly commenced. Even away here in our little mountain village, do we hear the roll of the drum & the tromp of our associates as they drill in the streets already enlisted in the service of their country...There is but one feeling it is serve our country. Sustain our government at all hasards & compromise as soon as possible.”²³

For the time being though, George had not joined the ranks of the military like so many other men who had heeded Lincoln’s call for troops. George wrote in response to her anxious letter that he would not “rush headlong into this conflict” but if and when he enlisted, he would act “from a sense of duty” and “shall do it with all calmness and candor.” He reiterated to her again that had he “not been unwell at the time the first company was made up, I should certainly have been in the ranks.” He also stated that he had not realized how he really loved his country until the “attack on Fort Sumter by those traitors” and that he was willing to defend the constitution and the Flag “at all hazards and at whatever the cost of blood and treasure” and if his blood was “required to nourish the tree of Liberty,” that he would freely give it.²⁴

After finally receiving word from George that he was safe and not in the military, Hattie wrote back to him about her lack of surprise that his brother Richard had volunteered for the army, but admitted that she had half expected (or feared) that Richard had “not gone alone,” meaning that George had enlisted with his brother. She reiterated to him again that “this is a time of great Enthusiasm & not do things riskily...let us weigh matters well & carefully-we all

²¹ Martin, 8

²² George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, April 20, 1861 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

²³ Frances Harriet Rowell to George Ela, April 21, 1861 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

²⁴ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, April 26, 1861 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

owe a duty to ourselves as well as our country and it will not do for every one to enlist in its cause! At least for the present there seems more than a full supply.”²⁵

However, Hattie’s fears were realized when George enlisted in Company G of the 33rd Illinois Volunteer Regiment on August 20, 1861. He mustered in as the First Lieutenant of the company. In a letter George had written to Hattie on August 4th, he stated that Charles Hovey, president of Illinois State Normal University in Bloomington, had just been authorized by the War Department to raise a regiment that would “be comprised of Teachers, pupils, and literary men of Illinois.” He also stated that the regiment would be ready to report for duty by August 25 and that if he could make the necessary arrangements that would allow him to fill any position within the regiment, that he would more than likely join the regiment.²⁶

Indeed, the 33rd Illinois Volunteer Regiment was formed on August 20, 1861 after “that great outburst of patriotism which followed the disastrous battle at Bull Run (July 21, 1861) which rallied the entire North to the cause of preserving the Union.”²⁷ Hovey had organized the unit after he learned of the utter defeat of the Union forces at Bull Run while he was in Washington D.C. on business. He met with President Lincoln and “told him about his ‘Normal Company’ and his desire to obtain authority to raise a regiment in addition to the calls for troops that had been made.” Three weeks after Hovey had returned to Bloomington, he enlisted nine companies to make up the new regiment.

Hovey’s “Normal Company,” was made up of students and faculty from ISNU.²⁸ It was known locally as the “Normal Rifles,” and was formed at ISNU shortly after the attack on Fort Sumter as a way to try and keep the male students and faculty from hastily enlisting after President Lincoln’s initial call for troops. Hovey hired a drill master to teach military tactics to any interested male students and faculty after school hours and on Saturdays. It was his “Normal Rifles” who were the foundation of the 33rd, forming Company A.²⁹ Hovey, being the founder of the regiment, was made the Colonel and commander of the 33rd. The unit mustered into the U.S. Army on September 6, 1861 and was commonly known as the “Teacher’s Regiment” due to the fact that it “attracted other teachers and students from across the state to its ranks.” Company G, which George was a member of, was made primarily of men from McLean County, Illinois.

Upon receiving word from George of his plan to enlist, Hattie wrote to him that she had been “expecting or fearing” that this would happen. She wrote that her “selfish feelings still predominate in spite of all the patriotism” she could muster up and it was her hope that he would not be needed. She continued on by stating that if his feelings of duty still urged him forward, that

“I can only submit & from a personal as well as patriotic motive hope this fraternal strife will soon close and our once glorious union again restored to power & prosperity. Were my own happiness & hopes needed for its

²⁵ Frances Harriet Rowell to George Ela, April 28, 1861 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

²⁶ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, August 4, 1861 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

²⁷ Isaac Elliot. *History of the Thirty-Third Illinois Veteran Volunteer Infantry In The Civil War 22nd August, 1861, to 7th December, 1865.* (Gibson City: The Association, 1902) 5

²⁸ Elliot, 7-8

²⁹ John Burnham, “The School and the War,” *Semi-Centennial History of the Illinois State Normal University, 1857-1907.* (Normal: David Felmley, 1907) 20

consummation I could freely yield them...but while yielding them there is a pang which I can not overcome."³⁰

In response to Hattie's growing concerns, George replied he understood her concerns for his safety, but he was duty bound to take up arms in defense of his country. Furthermore, he stated that he would enlist "not from a desire of fame or to gain the applause of my fellow man that enlist the war. I do it from a conscientious sense of duty. Duty to my God. Duty to my County. Duty to you and duty to myself."³¹

In this same letter, George again asked Hattie to come to Illinois to be with him, especially now that he would soon be off to the war. This request was not only because he truly wished to be married to Hattie, but also because of the distinct possibility that he could be killed. He wished to "place Harriet in possession of all benefits that may result from his service in the army in case he should not survive" and to have been united in marriage with Hattie and have known true happiness even if for just a short time should he perish during the war.³² Again, Hattie turned down his marriage request citing both economic reasons (that it was better for her to stay in New Hampshire for the time being where she had steady teaching jobs) and the fact that she did not like the idea of marrying George simply to reap the benefits should he die in battle.³³

She would come to regret this decision. In a letter she wrote to George on September 3rd, she stated that even though she did not desire to entertain the idea of marrying just for the benefits she would receive if he was killed in action, she could have consented to marry him if he so desired it before he was engaged in service, but now that he was already off to war, she could "hardly see any possible way to make sure an arrangement if it was best."³⁴ For almost a year, she would be forced to wait on "pins and needles" for letters from George which would give her some sort of peace of mind in knowing that he was not wounded or worse had perished, and had survived yet another day in the service for the Union.

George was first sent to Camp Butler, located just outside of Springfield, Illinois. He reported there for duty on August 30, 1861. It was here that he began training for life as a soldier in the Union army. In his letters to Hattie, he wrote about the activities he was engaged in during his time at the camp which included drilling and pitching tents. He also wrote about the conditions of the camp which in his opinion were good considering there were five to six thousand men stationed there. After having been a soldier for just a few days, George wrote that "on the whole I like soldier life so far very much—How it will wear time will provide."³⁵

After staying at Camp Butler for several weeks, the 33rd was given their marching orders and began the journey into the South bound for Ironton, Missouri. George was not sent immediately to Missouri, but would follow with the rest of his regiment on October 24th as he

³⁰ Frances Harriet Rowell to George Ela, August 10, 1861 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

³¹ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, August 11, 1861 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University).

³² Martin, 57

³³ Martin, 57-58

³⁴ Frances Harriet Rowell to George Ela, September 3, 1861 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

³⁵ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, September 1, 1861 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

had business to attend to back in Bloomington. Hattie, however, was not happy upon receiving news from George that he was now stationed in Missouri. She had hoped that he would be stationed in the east, either in Washington D.C. or in Virginia, where the battle front activity was not as violent as it was in Missouri at the time. In a letter George wrote to Hattie on October 27th, he outlined his journey south from Camp Butler. He stated that a squad of eight men were his escorts for his journey to “the seat of war.” They traveled by rail through Illinoistown (known today as East St. Louis, Illinois), crossed the Mississippi River and boarded another train on the Iron Mountain Railroad bound for Pilot’s Knob, Missouri where the rail line ended.³⁶ From there they traveled to Arcadia, Missouri where they met up with the rest of the 33rd, who had already been engaged in battle (at Frederick Town) and was working on the construction of Fort Hovey, their base of operations while stationed in Missouri.

It was at Ft. Hovey where George and the other men of the 33rd began learning how to be soldiers. The men spent the winter at the fort drilling, learning battle tactics, studying army regulations, and adjusting to their new lives as soldiers. In a letter dated October 27th, Hattie wrote to George that she was sad to see so many inexperienced boys going off to war because they hardly knew how to care for themselves. But, she had one consolation in this matter in that she knew that George knew how to take care of himself, especially since he had escaped many a slough hole while surveying the prairies of Illinois.³⁷

After spending the winter preparing for war, on March 1, 1862, the men of the 33rd “moved southward toward the land of cotton,” leaving Arcadia, MO and began the journey to Arkansas under the command of General Frederick Steele.³⁸ The journey was long and arduous with each soldier carrying a gun, cartridge box, haversack, canteen and knapsack. The knapsacks “with its contents weighed at least forty pounds, many of them more; and on top of this was strapped an overcoat. These knapsacks contained extra clothing, books, pictures, writing materials, geological specimens, and bric-a-brac of all kinds.”³⁹ They reached Arkansas in about mid-April. While at Batesville, Arkansas, George and the members of Company G were sent on detached duty in search of supplies. They were sent down to “Wild Haw” (located in Izzard County, AR) and after three days came back with “a lot of fine mules for Government wagon service.”⁴⁰ This was the first of many such missions on which George and the members of his company would be sent during his time in the Union Army.

Throughout the spring and into the summer, George and the members of the 33rd journeyed further south in Arkansas. Their mission was to “collect” baled cotton and load it on steamboats to send back North to be used in production. Before they began their mission, they engaged Confederate forces outside of Helena, AR at the Battle of Cotton Plant. After defeating the enemy, they arrived safely in Helena and began their “Cotton Campaign.” The campaign lasted until October of 1862.⁴¹

³⁶ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, October 27, 1861 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

³⁷ Frances Harriet Rowell to George Ela, October 27, 1861 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

³⁸ Elliot, 148

³⁹ Elliot, 26

⁴⁰ Elliot, 149

⁴¹ Martin, 45-46

In a letter to Hattie on August 8, 1862, George wrote that only the 33rd was engaged in this “novel service” and had been detached from the main army for the purpose of “stealing cotton.” Since they had left Helena, AR on July 26th, they had taken about 1000 bales of cotton and shipped it north.⁴² George also wrote about the large numbers of slaves who flocked to Union forces as they moved further south. He wrote that he had never seen such a crowd of “darkies” before, “all expecting to go with the Yankees.” Unfortunately, the hundreds who had flocked to the 33rd could not all be sent north. Therefore, they retained about sixty of the former slaves to use as laborers or servants and the rest were forced to “remain where they were.”⁴³ Skirmishes were also common when the 33rd took cotton that was baled or at the gins. They lost several soldiers during these “raids” as they were constantly being shot at while passing up and down the Mississippi River in boats in.⁴⁴ Fortunately, George was never hurt during these raids.

As George ventured deeper into the South, Hattie became more and more concerned for his health, not only whether or not he would be wounded or killed in battle, but also about if he contracted dysentery, typhoid, malaria, or any other number of diseases. Disease killed more men during the War than were killed in battle. Hattie feared that the extreme heat would make George ill.⁴⁵ On May 25, 1862, Hattie wrote to George of her wish that he would soon be able to come back to Littleton for some rest and avoid the hot months. “Haven’t you been long enough in the service as for some other care to admit of a respite & change of climate for a time this fall?”⁴⁶ George’s answer to her question was that he could not get leave of absence because he was not ill. He would only get leave if he was given a certificate by a surgeon “that such absence is necessary to save life and my present state of Health will not hardly warrant such a certificate.”⁴⁷

George’s letters were filled with news of the war and what his regiment and other Union regiments were doing. Hattie’s letters to George were filled with news about friends and family back home and what activities she engaged in on a daily basis. She also had many questions for George about what he was doing and asking him about rumors she read in the newspapers about the war. While she tried to not completely fill her letters to George with the war, it was hard to not write about it since it was a major part of their lives at the time. It was also hard for Hattie’s mind to not wander to the war or to constantly think of George. In a letter dated January 6, 1862, Hattie wrote that she had attended a New Year’s Eve party in Bath, NH with some of her students. She stated that her thoughts did not permit her from fully engaging in the gayety which surrounded her. She wrote that her thoughts “stray away off amid danger & darkness, the scenes of war & the possibilities of the future and with a pang & an effort I recall myself & try to

⁴² George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, August 8, 1862 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

⁴³ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, August 8, 1862

⁴⁴ Elliot, 29-30

⁴⁵ Martin, 21-22 & 24

⁴⁶ Frances Harriet Rowell to George Ela, May 25, 1862 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

⁴⁷ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, August 17, 1862 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

except the way & walk therein that Providence has set before me.”⁴⁸ From her letters to George, it is clear that her thoughts often strayed to a dark future without George, which was a distinct possibility.

After enduring almost a year of worry and anxiety over George’s health and safety during the War, Hattie finally received some good news from George. As of September 5, 1862, George had resigned his commission as a 1st Lieutenant in Company G of the 33rd. While it was officially recorded that George had resigned his commission “on account of failing health,” some members of his company recalled many years later that “it was known that his relations with the Captain (Ira Moore) were not the most agreeable” at the time so that may have “influenced his action.”⁴⁹ He had written to Hattie before that he was unhappy in his current situation and wished to either form his own company or to join a new regiment that was forming back in Bloomington (the 94th Illinois Volunteer Infantry). However, neither of these options remained open to him by the time he had left the 33rd so he obtained “a position in the Engineer Corps stationed at Helena.” He then reported to Captain Hoelcke, the Engineer in Chief, and served as his assistant.⁵⁰ In a letter dated September 21, 1862, he wrote to Hattie that he “packed up” his “duds bid goodbye to the boys of Co. G. and took up my line of march for Helena.” His new task was to “superintend the construction of a Fort for the defence of this town.” He also stated that the labor, “except the carpentry” was “entirely performed by contraband that have been emancipated by Gen. Curtis. They are, while on the work, in the immediate charge of six corporals who are detailed as overseers....so that all the Engineers (like George) have to do is to give directions to the overseers.”⁵¹ With his new position away from the battle front, the future had become much brighter for George and Hattie.

A move that brought George and Hattie even closer together was the fact that she and her family moved to McLean County in September of 1862. She first settled in White Oak Township with her brother Clint and then later lived with her mother and father in Danvers. In a letter dated September 24, Hattie wrote to George that even though she was nearly 1200 miles away from her Eastern home, she did not hardly realize it as she and her family were very much pleased with their new western home and were enjoying themselves finely.⁵²

After only being in McLean County for a few short weeks, Hattie’s brother Clint received a letter from George which stated that he “would be returning to Bloomington in the latter part of October” and wished to meet with Hattie upon his arrival.⁵³ Throughout the rest of the year and on into 1863, George traveled back and forth between Bloomington and wherever he was posted for the Union Army, (of which very little is

⁴⁸ Martin, 62-63 and Frances Harriet Rowell to George Ela, January 6, 1862 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

⁴⁹ Elliot, 150

⁵⁰ Martin, 49-50

⁵¹ George Ela to Frances Harriet Rowell, September 21, 1862 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

⁵² Frances Harriet Rowell to George Ela, September 24, 1862 (Rowell Papers, University Archives Illinois State University)

⁵³ Martin, 67

known about).⁵⁴ In December of 1862, George was sent to Mississippi by the Bloomington City Council to retrieve the body of Lt. Colonel William McCullough, a native of Bloomington.⁵⁵ McCullough, commander of the 4th Illinois Cavalry, was killed at the Battle of Coffeeville in Mississippi on December 5, 1862.

Finally, in June of 1863, George was appointed a Deputy Provost Marshal for the 8th Congressional District in Illinois. A provost marshal took on the duties of a chief of police and a magistrate during a time of war. Among the duties assigned to a provost marshal included “the suppression of marauding and the depredations on private property, and the preservation of good order.” A provost marshal would also have been “entrusted with the duty of making searches, seizures, and arrests, the custody of deserters from the opposing forces and of prisoners of war, the issuance of passes to citizens, and the bearing of complaints of citizens.”⁵⁶ As a deputy provost marshal, George would have been charged with upholding all of these responsibilities and would have reported directly to the Provost Marshal of his district. He served in this position until the end of the Civil War when the position was abolished.

One interesting incident which occurred in George’s life (which remains unclear how he became involved in this incident) happened in Cheney’s Grove in McLean County. A Copperhead lecturer, Mr. G. W. Ross, was traveling through the county speaking about the War and the state of the country. What was unknown at the time Ross came through McLean County was that he was a horse thief as well. Upon his arrival in McLean County, he had come up from Macon County by horse; a horse he had stolen. Upon reaching Heyworth, IL, he sold that horse to a man named Statten for the sum of \$95. He borrowed a mule from Statten to ride while in Heyworth but continued riding it to Bloomington where he sold it as well. Ross then went back to Mr. Statten’s and stole the very same horse he had sold him and started on his travels again. Later, he arrived in Cheney’s Grove for a lecture and it was here that he was confronted by Ela who had a warrant for his arrest. Ela attempted to arrest Ross but Ross resisted, drew his revolver, and declared he would not be taken. After escaping, Ross reappeared some time later back in Cheney’s Grove with a crowd of 15 men with whom he swore he was going to burn the town of Saybrook. Ela “mounted his horse and started after him.” He found Ross and his gang and demanded Ross surrender. Ross refused and began to draw his pistol but was stopped in his tracks by Ela who had drawn his gun faster. Ela pointed the gun at Ross’s head and stated that “if he moved he was a dead man.” Shots were exchanged between the two after Ela’s horse was startled causing Ela to prematurely discharge his weapon. Ross, who had been wounded during the exchange of gun fire, was tracked down later that evening by Ela, Haines Cheney, and several others, and brought back to Bloomington. He was then sent to Clinton, IL where he was tried and later sentenced to jail.⁵⁷

Finally, on April 23, 1863 George and Hattie were united in marriage. They were married in a small double wedding ceremony (where George’s friend Ruben Davis

⁵⁴ Martin, 68

⁵⁵ “Special Meeting,” *The Pantagraph*, December 10, 1862.

⁵⁶ “The Provost Marshal and the Citizen during the American Civil War,” <http://www.civilwarhome.com/ProvostMarshal.htm>

⁵⁷ “A Copperhead Lecturer,” *The Weekly Pantagraph*, February 11, 1863

married Eliza Ellington) at the home of Mr. E. Rogers, Esq.⁵⁸ The couple then made their home at 309 E. Locust Street in Bloomington and went on to have three children; Clarissa, Guy, and Harriet.⁵⁹

After the War and beginning their new married life together, George and Hattie were very active in the community. George continued his work as a surveyor and went on to resurvey “most of the open prairie in the different townships of the county, which had not been surveyed since first laid out” in 1865-1866. Because of his work surveying McLean County, he was considered the authority “for corners and locations in the county.” On top of surveying, he was also noted for his work in civil engineering. He is remembered to have done “all of the work along the line of civil engineering for the original Bloomington & Normal street railway” as well as being instrumental in “establishing the tile drainage system” in McLean County and in the surrounding areas. He held the office of city engineer for several years and was also the county surveyor for twenty consecutive years.⁶⁰ George spent the last eight years of his life quietly, doing very little surveying work. He was engaged in work as a notary public and abstractor of deeds.⁶¹ He was also a member of the William T. Sherman Post #146 of the Grand Army of the Republic in Bloomington. The G.A.R. was a fraternal organization (like the American Legion of today) in which any veteran of the Union Army who served during the U.S. Civil War was eligible to join.

Hattie was very active in the Presbyterian Church to which she and George belonged. She was one of the organizers of North Presbyterian Church which was located at the corner of Locust and East streets in Bloomington. After that church building was sold and the congregation dissolved, Hattie and George joined Second Presbyterian Church where she continued to be an active member of the congregation. In particular, she was very active in raising money to fund the building of a new sanctuary for the church. Many residents of Bloomington remembered “the famous meals that the women of this church served in what was the Harber building at Market and Main streets in the 1890s.” The money raised from serving those meals was used to build the new church building.⁶² She also served as the treasurer of the Girl’s Industrial Home for twenty-five years. The Industrial Home was not a school for delinquent children, rather, it was a home for dependent children who were neglected or had no one to care for them. The Home was a place where they could have both a place to live and a place to get some education.

Just shortly before their thirty-fifth wedding anniversary, Hattie would be forced to live a life without George again. On February 5, 1898, George passed away at the age of sixty-five. Two weeks before his death, George caught a very bad cold which eventually turned into pneumonia. Death came quickly and was a great surprise to his friends and family. He was remembered as a quite man, with a retiring disposition who made friends readily and held them for many years. He was widely known throughout

⁵⁸ “Ela-Rowell, Davis-Ellington,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, date unknown

⁵⁹ Martin, 68

⁶⁰ *The Biographical Record of Mclean County*, 487

⁶¹ “The Hand of Death,” *The Daily Bulletin*, February 6, 1898

⁶² “Death Summons Mrs. Geo. P Ela,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, January 11, 1924

the county and was held in high esteem by many people.⁶³ His funeral was held at the family home on Locust Street and was “attended by a large number of friends and family.” Among those present were members of his old regiment, the 33rd Illinois Volunteer Regiment, some of whom served as pall bearers. He was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.

Hattie lived another twenty-six years after George’s death. During the last few years of her life, she spent the winters with her daughter Harriet Bowen, in Springfield, IL and traveled throughout the Midwest during other parts of the year. While spending Christmas and New Years with her daughter and other family members in Springfield, Hattie was stricken by an unknown illness. Her health rapidly declined, she lost consciousness, and never awoke again. Just a few hours before she had taken ill, it was said that she was contemplating taking a walk up to the State House in Springfield. Hattie died just three days later on January 10, 1924. She was remembered as a remarkable woman who was devoted to both her family and community.⁶⁴ Her body was brought back to Bloomington where she was buried next to her husband George in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

By: Candace Summers, 2011

⁶³ “Death of George P. Ela,” *The Pantagraph*, February 7, 1898

⁶⁴ “Death Summons Mrs. Geo. P. Ela”