

Mary Elder (1835-1889)

Mary Elvira Elder was born in Bloomingburg, Ohio, on September 18, 1835 (according to her grave marker), or November 15, 1835 (according to her obituary). Her parents were Dr. Eleazor and Catherine (Perkins) Martin. Mary was their fifth child, but three older sisters had died from scarlet fever before she was born. Her father was a doctor, and Mary and her sister Clara went to school in Bloomingburg.

In 1854, when Mary was about 19, her family moved to Illinois. Her father had bought land in what is now Martin Township 14 years earlier, but the family settled in Bloomington, at 77 East Front Street instead. The Elder family, who also moved to Bloomington in 1854, lived nearby at 97 East Grove Street. The two families probably met at church or other social events. William Elder, the oldest son of the Elder family, was also a doctor like Dr. Martin. Charles Stewart Elder, William's brother, worked as a tinsmith and hardware salesman before marrying Mary.

On September 2, 1856, Mary and Charles got married, and it is said that Abraham Lincoln attended their wedding. Afterward, they moved to Lexington, Illinois and eventually had a total of eight children: Lora (Laura), Harry, Josephine (Jossie), Edgar (Eddie), Lucy, Charlotte, Grace, and Charles. Sadly, Harry and Lucy died as babies, and their youngest child, Charles, passed away from diphtheria in 1886 at the age of 9.

Charles decided to study medicine after advice from Mary's father. He started learning from his brother, Dr. William Elder, in the summer of 1861 and continued his studies in Chicago that fall. However, when the Civil War broke out in April 1861, Charles had to put his medical studies on hold. He joined the 33rd Illinois Volunteer Regiment Band on September 19, 1861, and became a Lieutenant. While Charles was away at war, Mary and their three children (Lora, Jossie, and Eddie) stayed with her parents in Lexington. During this time, Mary wrote many letters to Charles, updating him on their family, friends, and community events. Charles also wrote letters to Mary, and they stayed in touch through these letters, even though they were often separated by dangerous conditions.

While Charles was away, Mary kept life as normal as possible for their children. She organized a tea party for Lora and other children, and she made sure they had gifts for Christmas. As time passed, the children grew older. Eddie was no longer breastfed, Jossie started speaking more clearly, and Lora learned how to write. Mary missed Charles and often signed her letters with the hope that he would return soon.

During holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas, the family kept an empty chair at the table, remembering Charles. Charles sent part of his earnings back to Mary, and she saved most of it for when he returned and to support his future medical studies. The last letter from Charles was written on August 6, 1862, and he expressed hope that he would be home soon. However, he was discharged from the military on August 16, 1862.

After the war and completing medical school, Charles and Mary moved their family to Chenoa, Illinois before 1865. They had three more daughters and another son. In 1877, they moved to Lincoln, Illinois, where Charles had a medical practice and a drugstore. By 1884, they returned to Chenoa, where Mary lived for the rest of her life.

Mary passed away on July 18, 1889, after being ill for a year. She was a member of the Star of Bethlehem Chapter No. 114, Order of Eastern Star, and one of the first members of St. Matthews Episcopal Church in Bloomington. Mary was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery

with her parents and some of her children. Charles lived for a few more years and passed away in 1911.