

McLean County Museum of History

George P. Ela and Frances Rowell Collection

Processed by Torii Moré
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Collection Information

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 Box
COLLECTION DATES:	1858-1862
RESTRICTIONS:	None
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History.
ALTERNATIVE FORMATS:	None
OTHER FINDING AIDS:	None
LOCATION:	Archives
NOTES:	More detailed biography is available online with the other Cemetery Walk biographies. See also Kimberly Martin. <i>What Dreadful Times These Are: The Civil War Letters of Frances Harriet Rowell, 1861-1862</i> . (Master's Thesis, Illinois State University, August 1995). Available in Museum Library stacks, call # MCA 973.715 MAR.

Historical Sketch

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. 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. She attended the academy at McIndoes Falls in Vermont, and after graduating, 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. He was born on July 13, 1832, in Lisbon, NH, one of seven children born to Cyrus and Elizabeth Ela. At McIndoes Falls Academy he studied surveying and civil engineering.

After graduation, he also taught school in the area around Lisbon, remaining 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.” Hattie, having no such desire for adventure, remained in Littleton where she continued to teach school. The relationship between George and Hattie continued to grow through letter writing.

George settled in Bloomington, opening an office on the southwest corner of Main and Front Streets where he worked as a surveyor and civil engineer. He enlisted in Company G of the 33rd Illinois Volunteer Regiment on August 20, 1861. He mustered in as the First Lieutenant of the company, though he later resigned his commission to obtain a position in the Engineer Corps.

Hattie’s 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. Throughout the rest of the year and on into 1863, George traveled back and forth between Bloomington and where ever he was posted for the Union Army.

On April 23, 1863, George and Hattie were united in marriage. The couple then made their home at 309 E. Locust Street in Bloomington and went on to have three children; Clarissa, Guy, and Harriet. George and Hattie were very active in the community. George continued his work as a surveyor. 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.

On February 5, 1898, George passed away at the age of sixty-five, and 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. She died on January 10, 1924, and is buried next to her husband George in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

By: Candace Summers, 2011

Scope Note

This collection contains photocopied letters (and digital documents of transcriptions) from George Porter Ela and Frances Harriet Rowell. Original letters are located in the Illinois State University archives.

Box and Folder Inventory

Folder 1: Biographical Information

- 1.1 Biographical information for George Ela and Frances Rowell.
- 1.2 Notes on letters

Folder 2: Letters from Frances Harriet Rowell to George Ela

- 2.1 Approximately 33 letters from 1859-1862 from Frances Harriet Rowell to George Ela.

Folder 3: Letters from George Porter Ela to Frances Rowell

- 3.1 Approximately 31 letters from 1858-1862 from George to Frances (“Hattie”) Rowell.

Loose Items:

- 1 CD containing transcriptions of the letters above.