

ANNALS OF IOWA

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

MRS. LETTS AND HER "DEAR OLD IOWA"

Albina Brockway Letts, a pioneer woman of southeastern Iowa, died December 31, 1929, at Clarendon, Texas. Her passing deserves more than formal notice.

Mrs. Letts was born August 26, 1838, on the spot now known as Brockwayville, Jefferson County, Pennsylvania. Her parents, James M. and Lydia Goff Brockway, were among the first settlers of the place, then on the wooded frontier of that part of the state, and the town they helped establish was named for the family. Mr. and Mrs. Brockway removed to Muscatine County, Iowa Territory, in 1842 and settled near where Cone now is and raised their large family there. Albina attended the pioneer rural school, the first being in a log schoolhouse. She was one term a student in Cornell College, Mount Vernon, when it had hardly taken on the name of college.

After teaching school a brief period, in March, 1859, she became the wife of James Robinson Letts and they established their home on a farm near what is now Letts, Louisa County, about twelve miles from her girlhood home. There they lived for fifty-two years. Nine children were born to them, eight being reared to manhood and womanhood. During the long and arduous period of motherhood she found time to be a good friend and neighbor, never refusing a call of sickness or distress.

She had always loved to write. For many years she had conducted a Woman's Column in their home paper and had written many articles for papers and magazines of the state, was a regular contributor for some time to two Chicago papers, and wrote occasional articles and poems for religious papers. As the years passed and her home duties lightened she was free to turn more to literary pursuits.

Her literary talent ran largely to poetical thought, especially in her later life. She wrote many short poems that were collected by her daughter and published in book form as a souvenir of her golden wedding.

She joined the Methodist Episcopal church in her girlhood, and retained to the last the beauty of a christian character. On her death the body was brought back by her children and laid to rest beside that of her husband in the cemetery at Letts.

The later years of her life were principally spent with some of her children in Texas. A few years before her death, when almost ninety years old, it was concluded to spend the summer in Iowa, and the thought of returning in spring time to the home of her girlhood and young womanhood was so inspiring that when they were packing to go she jotted down the lines of the following beautiful little poem as she worked:

DEAR OLD IOWA

It's May back there in Iowa
 And all the woods are green;
 The ferns unfolding in the shade,
 And in each sunny nook and glade
 The violets and bluebells bloom.
 The orchards are all pink and white,
 There's perfume all the day.
 And life is sweet and full of hope
 And every power has freer scope,
 In spring, in Iowa.

The meadow lark still sings and and soars,
 And trills and thrills on high.
 I long to hear his lilting lays,
 And join again in grateful praise
 This minstrel of the sky.
 Oh, other lands are fine and fair,
 For God's good gifts fall everywhere;
 But still the heart clings to the day
 When life was young and love was sweet,
 And time sped by on golden feet,
 Back there in Iowa.

Oh Iowa, the beautiful!
 Hold out your hands to greet
 The wanderer from your pleasant plains,
 Your fruitful fields and golden grains,
 Who comes with eager feet
 To find the dear old friends and homes,
 To clasp hands by the way,
 To smile and sigh, to laugh and cry—
 But every sign of age deny—
 In dear old Iowa.

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