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Story of an Iowa Woman

It was in 1892, when I went to Waverly to become principal of the high school, that I first met a charming old lady, then in her seventy-eighth year. Her name was unfamiliar to me because I was not at all versed in Iowa history and I had never heard of the name of Oran Faville whose widow she was. She was wearing her black widow's garb, as had been her custom for many years, and, perhaps because she and her husband had no children, she was known to the community as Auntie Maria or Auntie Faville. For more than a quarter of a century she had taught a class in the Sunday school of the Methodist Church. Her personality was distinguished and I have never forgotten the words she used in encouraging the beginner in his new duties. And now, a long time after this first meeting, it has occurred to me that something of her history and that of her well-known husband, Lieutenant Governor Oran Faville, may be worth while.

Maria M. Peck, born at Mexico, New York, on September 18, 1815, was a student at Cazenovia Seminary, located near Syracuse, New York, in the years 1838 to 1840, entering school there the year Iowa became a separate Territory. This Seminary had been founded in 1824 under the authority of the Oneida Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Miss Peck was so appreciated by the trustees, or whatever the members of the governing body of the Seminary were then called, that in 1841 she was appointed "governess, instructress in modern languages, drawing, painting and botany." From 1841 to 1845 she was also preceptress. Under her instruction in this coeducational institution were some men whose names are well known across this nation.

While serving in these different capacities in the Seminary, Miss Peck had time for a correspondence with a young man at the Fairfield Academy, who later taught ancient languages at the Cazenovia Seminary. A letter in her fine script dated October 11, 1841, was addressed to Mr. Oran Faville, Fairfield, Herkimir County, New York, and in the customary fashion of that day was sealed without an envelope. The letter began: "Mr. F—, the bell has rung the hour for evening study and having visited all the rooms in the Ladies Halls to see that their inmates were

busy with their tasks, I have seated myself to my lesson which I have been conning for two or three weeks, and have not yet been able to learn. I would that I knew whether I ought to ask him who gave me that lesson to explain it . . . I will not yet."

Then it seems she drew on her surroundings for illustrative material in expressing her feelings. "What a changing world is ours! I recollect that when I last wrote to you the earth was flooded with radiance and in that light we could read beauty written on everything. But this evening the spirit of the storm is out wrapped in his robe of clouds and his moaning voice tells of nothing but desolation and death. The withered leaves borne by his breath against my window seem warning spirits and their sad language calls forth an echo even from my buoyant heart. . . .

"To me a correspondence owes much of its value to the sentiments which prompt it and these I ever wish frankly to express, though in this recent instance I may be thot trampling on the rules of propriety. . . . It is only upon a long acquaintance that I can decide upon the choice of friends. As our acquaintance has been brief I feel much hesitation in complying with your request, fearing that if, after more mature deliberation, I should wish to discontinue the correspondence you might

think me guilty of pursuing that course which I never wish or intend to take. Should you consider it in this light I must now say adieu. If not, your letters will be received and returned with pleasure. Our school is flourishing and my situation is very pleasant. Maria."

The outcome of this correspondence was the marriage of Maria Peck and Oran Faville on July 24, 1845, in DeWitt, N. Y. They took up their residence at West Poultney, Vermont, where he was at first a teacher of ancient languages and later principal of Troy Academy. Mrs. Faville continued in this Academy the work she had carried on at Cazenovia. From Vermont they moved westward to McKendree College at Lebanon, Illinois, where Mr. Faville filled the chair of ancient languages for one year. At the close of that year Mr. Faville became the first president of the Ohio Female College at Delaware, Ohio. Mrs. Faville was preceptress there, also, but after a very short service they resigned on account of the illness of Mr. Faville.

With the hope that life on the prairies of Iowa would restore his health the Favilles removed to Mitchell County in 1855. It has been said that he "opened a new farm" and that seems to have been true in a rather large sense for, as the record shows, his first land deal was the purchase of a

fractional half section in section five, township ninety-eight, range seventeen, and another eighty acres nearby. For the nearly four hundred acres in these two purchases, he paid \$2,550. Later that year Faville purchased an additional quarter section for two hundred dollars. In June of 1855 there was another purchase of eighty acres for \$100, the government price as shown in the land office receipt. Other fractional purchases warrant the conclusion that the Favilles purchased about 600 acres of Mitchell County land.

It had been the hope of Mr. and Mrs. Faville that the outdoor life in the new country would restore the health of Mr. Faville and they wished to live a quiet life. But people of their type were in demand and he was soon called into the service of the public. The Constitution of 1857 provided that the Lieutenant Governor should be ex officio the presiding officer of the newly created State Board of Education. With rare appreciation of fitness for the office to be filled, political leaders picked Oran Faville for the post and in 1857 he was called to enter the campaign for Lieutenant Governor on the Republican ticket. Mr. Faville took an active part in the campaign and it is recalled that when speaking in Dubuque he addressed his German listeners in their own language. Oran Faville became the first Lieutenant

Governor of Iowa, but he served only the one term.

In 1859 he was elected county judge of Mitchell County and took office in January of 1860, but the entire county judge system ended at the close of 1860. The most important business before the county judge during his brief term was the relocation of the county seat of Mitchell County. County judge Faville ordered the holding of an election to decide between Osage and Mitchell. Mitchell secured a majority, but Osage won out in the final decision.

Oran Faville was popular in Mitchell County; in 1862 he was that county's "favorite son" for the office of Representative in Congress, but he lost the nomination to William B. Allison. The following year he returned to Des Moines as Acting Secretary of the Board of Education and later was made Secretary. When the Board of Education was discontinued at the close of 1863, Oran Faville was named to the newly created office of Superintendent of Public Instruction by the General Assembly and in 1865 he was elected for the two-year term. Ill health again interfered and he was compelled to resign in March, 1867. He returned to his home in Waverly, Mitchell County, where he died in 1872.

In addition to these official positions, Oran Faville was an active participant in the educational

affairs of the State. He served as editor of the *Iowa School Journal* and as president of the Iowa State Teachers Association, and in all respects was regarded as a man of great ability. Long before there was a training school for teachers he had advocated such an institution. He was not permitted to be wholly free from the public call when he came to live in Waverly, for he served as president of the local board of education and aided in the erection of the first high school building. It was his wish to live quietly but he never refused to serve the public when his health permitted.

Mrs. Faville did not leave the log house they had built on the Mitchell County farm when her husband was elected Lieutenant Governor. Instead she took upon herself the care of the property and she was abundantly able to do so, for she had grown up on a New York farm. That was not the usual way the wives of State officials managed their households. After Mr. Faville's death, Maria Faville continued to live in Waverly in the old home.

In 1895 an enterprising reporter for the *Chicago Record*, learning something of the life of Mrs. Faville, came to Waverly to interview her. He says: "I found her living in an unpretentious cottage of half a dozen rooms, located in the midst

of the shrubbery scattered here and there over the lawn. She was engaged in housework, which she put aside when I told her the object of my visit."

"Yes," she said to the reporter, "I shall be 80 years of age, if I live until the 18th of September. But I like to keep busy, although I have a touch of rheumatism now and then when a storm is coming up. Otherwise I have good health." At this point the Chicago man asked her if she ever heard from any of her students of Cazenovia Seminary. "Well, yes; here is a scrap book full of letters, some from Africa, China and Japan and in fact from almost all parts of the world. . . . Of those who were in my classes when preceptress, Mr. Leland Stanford became the wealthiest. Here is a letter from him inviting me to spend the summer on his ranch in California. No doubt it would have been pleasant to do so but I couldn't find time."

Here the inquisitive reporter asked about her pupil who became such a wealthy man. "How was he as a boy? Did he give any evidence when reciting to you that he would ever become possessed of forty or fifty million dollars, become Governor, United States Senator, found a great University and be talked of for president of the great republic?" To this she had a ready reply: "No, indeed, he was about the greenest, awk-

wardest boy I ever saw. We had a celebration one day when every boy was expected to escort a girl, but what bothered young Stanford was that he could not find a girl who would go with him. I had hard work to find a girl to accompany him but I finally succeeded.

"Charles Dudley Warner was one of my pupils. He was modest, studious and gave great promise even then of the literary distinction which he has achieved. After I had read certain of his books I wrote him to know if he was indeed the author who recited to me in French and Spanish." And then she showed the reporter the letter that had come from her former student.

"Although General Slocum [Henry Warner Slocum] did not recite to me," continued Mrs. Faville, "I knew him very well. He was born over at Delphi at the head of Pompey Hollow. He attended the seminary a term or two, taught school and then went to West Point and later commanded an army corps under Sherman. After the war he served several terms in congress from Brooklyn, Long Island. There was Joe Hawley [Joseph Roswell Hawley], Little Fighting Joe, as the boys called him, who recited to me in natural science as well as in Italian and Spanish. I get a letter from him now and then but I find it impossible to answer all my letters. Little Fight-

ing Joe could not have been idle much of the time, since he rose rapidly after leaving school to become major general, governor, and now United States senator from Connecticut." James Callanan of Des Moines was also one of Mrs. Faville's students.

Before the reporter left the modest home of Mrs. Faville he discovered that she was not a woman suffragist and had never attended suffrage meetings. Nevertheless she worked for temperance in the days when it was not a popular thing to do. She did say that "had I father or brothers, or husband who had been unkind to me, I might believe in what are called women's rights."

The visiting reporter concluded with this comment: "I came away and as I came I could not but think that this little town has had a resident for more than a score of years who is known personally to more distinguished people of the world than almost any one in the land, and yet so quietly had she lived and so completely had her life been absorbed in that of her distinguished husband, as an educator, that those living within a stone's throw of her home had only known her for her gentle Christian life."

While Mrs. Faville may not have been an advocate of women's rights in every sense, in the late sixties she rallied to the defense of women's

right to compensation for work in the field of education where they worked in the same ranks as men. A newspaper communication, signed "M. M. F.", argued for the equal pay of women in the public schools. Mrs. Faville said that she had no ambition to be a reformer nor to be classed among the "strong minded", but it was her belief that "when woman acts in her sphere and labors faithfully and successfully, she should be adequately paid."

On Monday, September 18, 1899, eighty-four friends of Mrs. Faville surprised her on her eighty-fourth birthday. They congratulated her and brought gifts. Among the memorials presented was a volume containing the names of over three hundred persons who had been instructed by her in Bible classes in the Methodist Church. She always maintained her active church life and after she had retired from teaching, she annually entertained those she had taught.

Mrs. Faville lived to be past eighty-eight years of age and passed quietly out of this life on December 28, 1903. Her life has been called a benediction, and it was a great privilege to know her even for a very short time.

CLARENCE R. AURNER