

MRS. SOPHIA M. DOLSON-ANDREWS

Among the early settlers of Des Moines who became closely identified with its social and educational affairs was Mrs. Sophia M. Dolson-Andrews.

She was born in Elmira, Steuben County, New York, April Twenty-seventh, 1829.

Her father, Johannes Van Dolson, was of Holland and English descent, and was born in New York in 1752. During the seven years' struggle for independence, he was at times actively engaged in ferreting out the intrigues of the Tories and Indians. His record shows three different enlistments. He was with Washington at the crossing of the Delaware, Christmas Day, 1775; at the battle of Saratoga, the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, and in other memorable battles. He was a member of the Masonic order at the time of the famous Morgan disappearance.

In 1835, he removed with his family to the wilds of Michigan, traveling from Detroit over corduroy roads in a mover's wagon to Bellevue, Michigan, and later to South Battle Creek, where many struggles and privations, unavoidable in a new, unsettled country, awaited the old soldier and patriot. In 1837, he yielded to the invincible, and was laid to rest at the age of eighty-five.

Sophia was placed in school, where she developed a fondness for books and close study, frequently winning the silver medal bestowed for good scholarship.

At that time, spinning was one branch of home training, and Mrs. Andrews frequently recurs to the fact that at the age of twelve, she spun the rolls from which were woven one hundred and twenty-five yards of cloth.

In the Fall of her thirteenth year, she entered the branch of the University of Michigan. At the age of fourteen, she began teaching, and continued to teach in public schools and seminaries for several years. She recalls with

pleasure the training of many boys who, later in life, became noted in business and other careers, among whom was General Shafter, of Cuban War fame, who, in an interview in New York, soon after the war, referred to her as the "gentle, brown-eyed teacher of my early youth."

She also taught in the University of Des Moines (now Des Moines College), during its opening year, 1866, under the presidency of Elder J. A. Nash.

She became a resident of Des Moines in 1863, where fields of activity and usefulness opened to her. In the Thirteenth General Assembly (1870), she was given a seat on the floor of the House of Representatives as correspondent of the *Chicago Evening Journal*, under a resolution presented by Honorable John A. Kasson, which thus conferred upon her the distinction of being the first woman officially granted a seat in the Legislature. During that and many subsequent sessions, the *Journal* contained her faithful record of Iowa Assemblies. She also furnished descriptive letters for home papers from the Philadelphia Centennial, in 1870, wrote sketches from the New Orleans World's Fair, in 1884, and contributed articles on subjects of the day to home papers.

In the early Seventies, she was a member of the Des Moines Relief Society of Charities, a corps of volunteers organized to dispense charities and relief to the poor, unfortunate, and needy of the city. She served twelve years as ward visitor and secretary. Amid the pinching blasts of Winter storm, through deep snows, and drenching rains, day after day, with her favorite horse, she sought the homes of squalor, poverty and want, a service requiring great physical endurance and self-abnegation, for which the consciousness of having carried cheer to many burdened and despondent ones was her reward.

That was during the days of toll bridges, but their gates, by authority of the City Council, swung freely open on her approachment, with a Godspeed from the keeper, who knew well the errand on which she rode.

At the beginning of her work, she secured, by subscriptions, fourteen hundred dollars, the first fund raised in the town to be dispensed by an organized charity system, and she has the subscription book in her possession yet. It contains the names of many who long ago passed to "the other shore."

Of her, it may be said she is strong in her convictions, independent in opinions, sweet in appeals for sympathy, charitable, and kind to the wearied and tried children of this life, her motto being:

“Say thou to each one thou mayest meet,
In lane, highway, or crowded street,
That he and we, and all men move
Under a canopy of love
As broad as the blue sky above.”

She is a member of the First Baptist Church. Her religion is not bounded by creed, but rather dominated by noble and unselfish deeds. She has been active in church work, also a leader in the formative club movement; was a charter member of a woman's club, fifty-five years ago, still in existence, to establish a circulating library; is a charter member of the Des Moines Women's Club, which made its advent in 1885; organized the *Madeline de Scudery* Club, of which she was chosen President, and has served continuously as President and Leader twenty-one years. She is a member of the Women's Press Club of Des Moines, now in its eleventh year.

At a meeting of the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs, May Fifteenth, 1907, at Oskaloosa, she was complimented by an unanimous election as Honorary State Vice-President. She was the first Regent of the Abigail Adams Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, organized in Des Moines in 1893, the honor being conferred upon her by the National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution, in recognition of her being a daughter of a Revolutionary soldier.

While she has been active all her life in the efforts to broaden the usefulness of women, and liberate them from the narrow bounds in which the customs of ages have held them, and, while a certain reward, very gratifying, has come to her from the recognition of her work in that direction, she holds in the most sacred place that which has come to her in the fulfillment of her duties as wife, mother and homemaker.