

# 1892 Barrington: Columbus, steam, courtship

By BARBARA BENSON

(This is the eighth in a series of articles based on a collection of family correspondence written from the West Main Street Octagonal House between 1889 and 1904.)

In February of 1892, Hattie Brown, the youngest daughter of Joseph and Emaline Hawley Brown, reached her 25th birthday. She was unmarried, and her life had followed the course of so many young women of that time who did not immediately marry in their late teens. She had become a schoolteacher, working most recently for a year at the Porter Schoolhouse on Buckley Road. She had also "subbed" at the Barrington Public School on Hough Street. While her letters to her sister Laura Nightingale in Fairmont, Minn. often refer to her past "flirtations," and her own recognition of herself as a flirt, her time at the Porter School was also the beginning of her courtship with Lorenzo "Ren" Porter, a director of the school who was a local farmer, with property encompassing the area of Oak Knoll and Buckley Roads.

In the spring of 1892, Laura Nightingale's first child, Arthur was a year old, and after Hattie had initially wanted to reject the fact that she was an Aunt and that the child even existed, she was finally won over by the delighted interest which Ren Porter showed in "Little Arthur," as if the boy were already his nephew. As the summer of 1892 approached, Hattie finally accepted Laura's invitation to spend some weeks in

Fairmont.

Because none of the letters from Minnesota have so far been found, there is little detailed information about Hattie's visit to Laura. Emaline continued to write on a regular basis from Barrington, and apart from noting Hattie's arrival, she chattered on in her usual way.

*Barrington, Saturday, June 4th, 1892*

*Dear Children and Grandchildren,*

*Well, Hattie, rec'd your postal this morning, so glad to hear of your safe arrival."*

And in the same letter:

*Well, Laura, how does it seem to have a sister out there with you. I hope you will both have a good time, and my little baby boy, how I do hope he is very much better, poor little fellow. I feel so sorry for him, but there is one consolation, he won't have to have it again. (Whooping cough) Roxanna is very much interested about baby, hoping to hear he is better. Mr. Crabtree said Hattie went off without saying a word to him about it but said if she had asked him he would have given his consent. It is quite warm today and people are trying to get their clothes dry that were washed the fore part of the week. There was a huge cinnamon colored bear led by here the other day, he walked along on the sidewalk as docile as a lamb. Nora Blakesly (that was) has a boy baby a few months old. Lu Austin has named her boy Edwin.*

## Storms threaten railroad

Emaline's letters that summer constantly referred to thunderstorms and heavy rains, to the loss of trees and flowers flattened by the winds and rain.

*June 23rd. Last night we had a very hard thunderstorm, it lasted a long time and today it is thundering and raining. I never saw anything like it. The pinks are so full of blossoms that they look like a solid mass of flowers, but the storms have laid them low, and the peonies are all destroyed by rain, and as fast as the roses bloom they share the same fate. Last night, the men that work on the railroad were ordered out to watch the railroad all night here, the dirt is higher than the track in some places and they were afraid it would wash down on the track and throw the train. George Waterman had two colts, and George Comstock a cow struck by lightning this week.*

In another letter, Emaline recounted the following story:

*I go over to Roxanna's often (her next door neighbor to the west, Roxanna Crabtree) the other day I went over and found the minister, Mr. Ward there. He got to talking about fixing up the church, he said he thought people ought to fix up God's house as well as their own. I told him I would like to ask him one question, and I asked him that after people had spent*

*thousands and thousands of dollars to build and fix up God's houses so nicely, why it was that he destroyed them by storms, why he struck them with lightning. That was a stumper, he could not say anything but he looked as if he would like to have me ask him something easy.*

Hattie returned from Fairmont, sometime during the second week of August 1892.

*My trunk went home by mil. and I got it this morning on the 10.10. We unpacked and have things airing for turnip smell is very strong. Never mind, they are so good. My barley heads broke all to pieces, but no harm done by it. My toque was nice. Ma says, "why that is your wedding hat isn't it?" You know I am not going to do anything till Sept. 1st and I have begun well.*

## Steam plows in Barrington

That progress was beginning to touch the curious little community of Barrington, where Yankee pioneer dwelt hand in glove with first and second generation German immigrants, is touched on in the following excerpt from the same letter:

*Last night about four o'clock, he (Pa) invited us to go up the R.R. a little way from above town to see the steam plow work digging dirt. It works very much like*



Joseph Brown and wife, Emaline, (center) pose for the camera with daughters Laura Nightingale and Hattie Porter. Laura lived in Minnesota and was the recipient of the letters from the Octagon House.