

The Journal of American History

VOLUME XXIV
NINETEEN THIRTY



NUMBER 2
SECOND QUARTER

Lindenwood: "The Education of a Woman for a Useful Life"

Narration of a Sixteen-Year-Old Girl's Service for
Other Girls, More Than a Century Ago

BY

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WHEN Fort Osage, an Indian trading-post of the government, was abandoned in 1827, to be superseded by Fort Leavenworth, Major George C. Sibley, with his wife, Mary Easton Sibley, came to St. Charles, Missouri, the latter part of October of that year, to reside.

Major Sibley, after the War of 1812, was interested in the purchase of land in St. Charles. His father-in-law, Rufus Easton, the

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first postmaster of St. Louis, was also interested in the purchase of land in St. Charles County. Major Sibley thought that after the war it was an opportune time to be possessed of good land which in after years would increase in value. Retiring from government service, it was only natural that he should come to the place where his possessions were and there end his days.

April 1, 1782, a son was born to Doctor John Sibley and Elizabeth Hopkins Sibley, at Great Barrington, Massachusetts. He was named George Champlin. George Champlin's father was a man of distinction, having served in the Revolutionary War. He had in him the blood of the pioneer, which was transmitted to his son. That son's mother was the daughter of Reverend Samuel Hopkins of Newport, Rhode Island. From the maternal side of the home was instilled the deeply religious nature of her offspring.

The Sibleys moved from Great Barrington to Fayetteville, North Carolina, where Mrs. Sibley died in 1790. From North Carolina Doctor Sibley went to Louisiana. His biographer, in explaining Doctor Sibley's removal from North Carolina, says:

"When John Sibley crossed the Charleston Bar in July, 1802, bound for the Spanish Possession, Louisiana, he started on a journey to a new country where he expected to better his condition in many ways. He little expected that he would simply emigrate from one part of the United States and take up his residence in another, for this did not seem to be his idea. He seemed to be trying to get away from conditions in North Carolina and wife number two.

"His move to Louisiana was just at the time when the change of ownership was about to take place: he was familiar or represented himself to be very familiar with the whole section of what is now the State of Louisiana, and to know all of the Indian tribes residing therein. He had traveled up Red River to the neighborhood of the present city of Shreveport. He knew something of the lands around Natchitoches and there he settled and made his home. He profited by his appointments, and also by his business and trading ability. He was therefore successful. Being successful he made some very close friends and some very bitter enemies. The latter seemed to be in the majority or to have the most influence."

In 1805 George Champlin Sibley (son of Doctor John Sibley), came to Missouri. In 1807 he was clerk in the Government Indian store at Fort Osage, situate on a bluff on the south side of the Mis-

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souri River, near the location of the present town of Sibley, in Jackson County. In May, 1808, he received his appointment, as agent at the trading-post, from the Secretary of War, General Dearborn, Missouri being then a part of the Territory of Louisiana. In August, 1820, Sibley was appointed to the additional office of postmaster at the fort.

The record of his war service is not available to the writer, but from Secretary of War, Dwight Davis, it was learned that many of the records of the Department of that period were destroyed by fire. It is a fair presumption, however, that Sibley took part in the encounter with the British in 1812 and that from his war experience he was given the rank of Major.

August 19, 1815, Major Sibley was married to Mary Smith Easton, eldest daughter of the Honorable Rufus Easton. She was not sixteen years old when she became Mrs. George C. Sibley, being born January 1, 1800. She possessed many of the sturdy qualities of her father, who became one of Missouri's distinguished men, after emigrating from Connecticut to St. Louis in 1803. As has been related, Rufus Easton was the first postmaster of St. Louis. He was appointed by President Thomas Jefferson as one of the first United States judges of the territorial court in Missouri, and was also given a private commission to watch General Wilkinson and Aaron Burr, who were under suspicion of treason.

Mary Easton had been given the best available education and was sent to the Tevis boarding-school of Shelbyville, Kentucky. The only means of getting there was on horseback. Her biographer informs us that "she had a splendid mind, was well grounded in Latin and French, and was an accomplished musician. She thought nothing of physical exercise. She travelled over a large portion of the east on horseback with her father, and made several trips to New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore in this way."

"Mrs. Sibley was pretty but that was not all. She had the courage and determination to accomplish things. In many of her ideas she was a hundred years ahead of her time. She was an early advocate of woman's rights and was a personal friend of Susan B. Anthony."

Mary Sibley was deeply interested in the education of young women. She rebelled at the idea that a woman was not capable of an education, that she was inferior in mentality to man. Living in this day and generation, she would behold her ideas more than real-

ized, when the general belief seems to prevail that there is nothing a man can do that a woman cannot do better. But Mrs. Sibley did not have the support for her contention she would find to-day. "The day is coming," she is reported as saying, "when women will take their rightful place along with men, as their equals."

When the young bride went to Fort Osage with her distinguished husband she began teaching, gathering the young about her to give them at least an elementary training. She never ceased being interested in the education of young women, and at her death she left behind a monument of her labors known as Lindenwood College, where the slogan of her making still remains: "The education of women for a useful life."

Whether Mrs. Sibley ever cherished the idea her dreams would come true we do not know, but the work of her life has borne wonderful fruition. The school that she founded has for a century been "carrying on." When the dark days came Mrs. Sibley saw a silver lining in the clouds. She must not and she could not fail. The little log school-house of 1831 gave way to what a New York newspaper in 1857 called the most pretentious school building in the West. It still bears the name "Sibley" and is the most cherished building on the campus. As time passed, friends of means were raised up to add to the financial strength of the institution, and on a campus of one hundred and forty acres are now school and dormitory buildings accommodating the maximum enrollment that will be received,—five hundred.

Mrs. Sibley found in her husband a mind in accord with hers, and to the Major must be given the credit of successfully co-operating to make his wife's dream of a school for women come true.

Lindenwood College rests on a site selected by Major Sibley, purchased in 1814, and named after the grove of linden trees where it was situated.

The date of the beginning of Lindenwood College is fixed as 1827, although some believe it should equal the date of the purchase of the land which some assert was acquired with "a far-off view" of the coming college. It is pretty well established, however, that Mrs. Sibley was still possessed with the idea of a school for young women, for immediately upon her return from Fort Osage she began her "school work" in St. Charles. In 1828 they were disappointed in the slowness of the work in erecting Linden Wood, which they were not

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permitted to enter until the first part of January, 1829. Major Sibley was evidently very proud of the new log school building, accommodating forty pupils, who came from St. Louis and the surrounding country. The first Commencement, in 1831, evidenced the triumph of the grit and perseverance of his wife and he began the history of the College by referring the date to 1831. Historians place the beginning in January, 1828, but the College correctly holds to the beginning as October, 1827.

When the plans for the school had been successfully carried out, the Sibleys asked the Presbytery of St. Louis to appoint a Board of Directors to manage the school. The church was the foster mother of higher education in those days. The Sibleys being Presbyterians naturally sought the direction of their ecclesiastical affiliation.

The College was an unchartered institution until 1853, when, by special act of the Legislature, it was chartered free of all taxes in the State of Missouri,—property and endowment. It is one of only four charters of like nature in existence granted by the Missouri Legislature. In 1870 the charter was amended, so as to transfer the appointment of the Board of Directors to the Missouri Synod of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., instead of the Presbytery of St. Louis. The school is non-sectarian. No religious tests are exacted of Faculty or students. One requirement of the Sibleys is faithfully lived up to—the Bible shall be a part of the curriculum on equal footing with any other subject taught.

The founding and development of Lindenwood College is filled with romance and heroism. The dream of a sixteen-year-old girl required untold deprivations and hard labor before it could be realized. The Sibleys, and only they, can count the cost. But, at any cost, it was worth to them the price.

Major and Mrs. Sibley were noted for their many public works. The Major is acclaimed by some as one whose public service to the government is second only to that of Thomas Jefferson. Mrs. Mary Easton Sibley is proclaimed as the leading pioneer in the education of young women. But the joy of their labors is found in St. Charles, Missouri, in the school they jointly founded and named. Self-glory they did not crave. The name Sibley gave way to God's most glorious handiwork to them—a forest of linden trees.