

## **Carl Schurz Vrooman (1872-1966) & Julia Scott Vrooman (1876-1981)**

Carl Vrooman was born on October 25, 1872, in Macon County, Missouri. He was the son of Judge Hiram Perkins Vrooman and Sarah (Buffington) Vrooman. His father, originally from New York, was a lawyer, a judge, and a landowner. The family moved to Kansas when Carl was young, and he spent his childhood there. Carl went to Washburn College in Topeka, Kansas, from 1890 to 1891, and later studied at Harvard University for about three years. He even spent a few months studying at Oxford University in England.

Julia Scott Vrooman was born on October 4, 1876, in Bloomington, Illinois. She came from a wealthy family. Her father, Matthew T. Scott, was an important figure in McLean County and had founded the town of Chenoa, Illinois. He owned large amounts of land in Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Julia's mother, Julia Green Scott, was related to famous figures like Thomas Jefferson, and was twice elected President of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution. After her husband's death, Julia's mother took over managing the family's land and farms.

Julia and Carl met in Europe in 1894 when Julia was 18 years old. They became close, and Carl often joked that he proposed marriage to her in every cathedral they visited. Julia finally agreed to marry him in Venice, on a moonlit gondola ride. The couple got married on December 28, 1896, in St. Louis, Missouri, in a ceremony attended by many family members. After their wedding, they traveled through Europe and then moved to Bloomington, Illinois, in 1900 to live with Julia's mother. Although Carl and Julia never had children, they shared a loving marriage for 69 years, often writing sweet letters to each other when they were apart.

Carl was interested in many things. He started his career as a publicist and was known for being a good writer. He also strongly supported the Democratic Party. However, his biggest passion was improving farming. This interest began when he served as Regent of Kansas State Agricultural College from 1898 to 1900. When he married Julia, he took on managing some of her family's large farms, which deepened his interest in agriculture. He even called himself a "dirt farmer" and worked hard on the farms in Illinois and Iowa.

Carl's focus on agriculture led to his appointment as Assistant Secretary of Agriculture by President Woodrow Wilson in 1914. He worked closely with Secretary of Agriculture David Houston. Although Carl had once run for U.S. Senate and lost, his reputation as a strong Democrat helped him get this job. He saw it as an honor to help with the important work being done by President Wilson's administration.

One of Carl's first jobs as Assistant Secretary was to travel around the country promoting better farming practices. He believed that farming should be done in a scientific way and that it should also be treated as a business. He argued that farmers needed to organize themselves both economically and politically to succeed. Carl also stressed the importance of marketing their products effectively.

Carl supported the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, which helped farmers by creating outreach programs through universities. These programs taught farmers new farming techniques and helped them solve problems. Carl believed these programs made agricultural knowledge more accessible to farmers, especially those who couldn't afford to pay for it.

Carl also spoke about the importance of better credit for farmers. He argued that banks were not doing enough to help farmers, who needed longer loans than what the banks were offering. In addition, Carl believed that improving roads in rural areas would help farmers by

making it easier for them to transport their crops to town. He thought that better roads would benefit everyone, not just farmers.

Throughout his travels, Carl realized that farmers needed information about new agricultural research in simple terms. To help, he wrote several books and pamphlets to teach farmers how to use new technologies and improve their farming practices.

In 1916, Carl wrote a pamphlet called *Grain Farming in the Corn Belt with Livestock as a Side Line*. In it, Carl shared his ideas on how to improve farming, especially for farmers in the Midwest who had been planting the same crops year after year, causing their soil to become less productive. He suggested methods like raising livestock, using lime to improve the soil, and rotating crops to keep the land healthy. Carl criticized farmers who only relied on the weather and didn't think ahead. He even made his tenants plant alfalfa to restore the soil, and if they didn't, he kicked them off the land. The pamphlet was simple and easy to understand, and because of its popularity, nearly one million copies were printed and spread across the country.

Carl and Julia were both known for their writing. They co-wrote a travel book called *The Lure and Lore of Travel* (1914), based on their experiences abroad. Julia also wrote a political mystery novel about Washington D.C. called *The High Road to Honor* (1924), which was well-received. One reviewer said the book was like a puzzle, where readers could try to figure out which real-life politicians inspired the characters.

During World War I, Carl didn't just focus on improving farming in the U.S. – he also worked to help feed the war-torn countries of Europe. Before the U.S. entered the war in April 1917, the government started preparing its citizens for the war effort. In March 1917, Charles Lathrop Pack, the president of the American Forestry Association, created the National Emergency Food Garden Commission to encourage Americans to grow their own food. Carl was part of this commission, which helped teach people how to start and care for their own gardens in their backyards or empty lots.

The National Emergency Food Garden Commission sent out articles to newspapers across the country, giving tips on everything from choosing seeds to harvesting and preserving crops. The goal was to encourage Americans to grow food in their own gardens to help feed soldiers and starving civilians in Europe. The campaign was meant to be both patriotic and practical, especially for people in cities who hadn't grown food before. In just a few years, the commission's goal of one million gardens grew to over five million across the U.S.

The program also asked Americans, especially women, to conserve food. The phrase "Food will win the war" became popular, and the U.S. Food Administration, led by Herbert Hoover (who later became president), urged people to cut back on meat, fat, sugar, and wheat so those resources could be sent to Europe. Women were expected to take the lead in this effort, especially since many were at home.

Carl traveled around the country, urging people to plant gardens, increase food production, and reduce food waste. On one trip, he met with officials from Mississippi and Tennessee to help organize farmers. In April 1917, he spoke to the General Federation of Women's Clubs in New Orleans, saying that women needed to help conserve food, just as soldiers were fighting for the country. In Chicago, he told a group of women to stop wasting food and to save seed potatoes for next year's crops. He said, "Waste is not only reprehensible, but it is also disloyal."

After the war ended, General John J. Pershing, who led the U.S. Army in Europe, wrote to Carl to thank American farmers for their hard work in feeding the soldiers and supporting the

war effort. He praised them for producing an extra 1 billion bushels of food to help both the army and the Allied Forces.

Julia also helped with the war effort. She supported the idea of growing war gardens and conserving food. In a speech to the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, she urged women to make sure no food was wasted. Julia also took a more direct role in the war effort by traveling to Europe to help with the YMCA, supporting American soldiers on the front lines. She worked with soldiers from August 1918 until late 1919, organizing activities to boost their morale. One of her projects was forming a jazz band from American soldiers to entertain the troops in France, Germany, and Belgium. She even hosted dinners and “cocoa parties” to help soldiers feel at home.

Julia faced challenges keeping the band together because of constant troop transfers. Once, she even convinced a commander to transfer two soldiers to a nearby village so they could stay in the band. Julia’s work in Europe earned her an honorary membership with the Veterans of Foreign Wars in 1921.

In addition to her work with soldiers, Julia was passionate about the idea of a World Court, which would later become the International Court of Justice. She believed the court would help keep peace by resolving conflicts between nations without war. Julia spoke out against politicians who misunderstood or misrepresented the idea, claiming it would only drag the U.S. into foreign disputes.

While Julia stayed in Europe until late 1919, Carl came back to the U.S. in 1919 after resigning from his position as Assistant Secretary of Agriculture due to poor health. Before leaving, he spent two months at the Paris Peace Conference to help with Europe’s agricultural problems. Julia continued her work in Europe until December 1919.

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After World War I, Carl was chosen by the American Farm Bureau to lead a relief mission to Europe. He was responsible for collecting, processing, and sending nearly a million bushels of corn to help starving people in Austria, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. This corn was a gift from American farmers. The Polish government honored Carl for his efforts. In 1921, Carl also wrote the first modern farm relief bill, which helped farmers sell extra crops to other countries. This bill became the first official farm program of the Democratic Party. While the bill had strong support, it was not passed in the end because it was “killed in conference” on the last day of the session.

Julia, Carl’s wife, organized a huge charity event called the Russian-Near East Relief carnival. It was said to be the biggest charity event Bloomington had ever seen up to that point. The carnival took place from June 29 to July 4, 1922, at “The Oaks,” a large mansion that had been owned by local businessman Asahel Gridley. The carnival had to be extended two extra days because of rain. There were 35 different activities, including dancing, vaudeville shows, performances by bands, and an open-air pavilion for dancing. Sidney Smith, a famous cartoonist, gave a drawing demonstration. There were booths and food stands, as well as raffles. The last night of the carnival had boxing matches, fireworks, and a minstrel show. Around 50,000 tickets were sold, and the carnival raised over \$6,000 (about \$86,000 in 2016). The money was sent to the Quakers, who then passed it along to the Near East Relief organization to help people in need.

Carl and Julia stayed active after World War I. Carl ran for U.S. Representative in 1946 and 1948 but lost both times to Republican Leslie Arends, who had held the seat since 1934. Carl and Julia were both deeply religious and members of Second Presbyterian Church in Bloomington. Carl was part of many organizations, including the Lions Club and the Masons. He also served as the president of the Community Players Theater and was involved with the American Red Cross. Julia was a leader in the Federation of Women's Clubs and often hosted parties at their mansion. During World War II, they turned the third floor of their house into apartments for soldiers and their families. They even turned their home into a hospital during the 1918-1919 Flu Pandemic.

Sadly, Carl passed away suddenly on April 8, 1966, just before their 70th wedding anniversary. He was 93. Julia lived for 15 more years. On her 100th birthday, she said she had never known a couple as close as she and Carl. She believed their strong religious faith was the secret to their long and happy marriage. Julia passed away peacefully at the age of 104 on May 30, 1981, in their home. She left behind an estate worth \$1.5 million in personal property and \$2.75 million in real estate. She was buried next to Carl and other family members in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.