

Georgina Trotter (1836-1904) was a dynamo of energy and a force to be reckoned with. According to *The Pantagraph*, “the history of this woman doesn’t need any adornment.”¹ When the United States Civil War broke out, she answered the call of duty and joined the Union Army as a nurse, escorting wounded soldiers from the South to the North on riverboats. After the war, she returned to Bloomington and became a successful businesswoman. So successful, that her talents were sought out by other local businessmen who came to her for advice. In 1874, she began a 15-year long career as a member of the Bloomington Board of Education, serving alongside her close friend, Sarah Raymond Fitzwilliam, who was the Superintendent of Bloomington Public Schools at the same time. Together, these women worked tirelessly to improve education for the students in Bloomington Public Schools until Trotter retired in 1889. Even after her retirement from the board, she continued to be interested in helping make Bloomington become a better place.

Georgina Trotter was born on August 15, 1836 in Drogheda, Louth County, Ireland. She was one of six children born to John and Ann (Kelley) Trotter. The Trotter family was Irish Protestant and belonged to an “aristocratic clan of agriculturists.”² Additionally, her father, John Sr., was also a prominent architect.³ He was responsible for designing several buildings in Duleek, Meath County, Ireland, including the Church of Ireland (1819) and the Duleek Courthouse (1838).⁴ The family also spent time living in Duleek (which is located about 10 kilometers from Drogheda).

In 1849, Trotter’s father, a sister, and a brother came to the United States and settled in Chicago, Illinois. Trotter, her mother, and the rest of her siblings arrived in the U.S. the following year.⁵ Although the Trotter family was wealthy, they too were affected by the famine which plagued the whole of Ireland.

In 1840 almost 2.5 million Irish people relied on potatoes for profit, nourishment, and their livelihood. The English landowners of Ireland rented out pieces of their land to poor Irish Catholics. The Irish would work these lands to produce a profit for the landowner. Enough potatoes were grown on these tracts of land to ensure sustenance for the tenant families to survive as well.⁶ In 1845 a plant pathogenic fungus (*Phytophthora infestans*) ruined the potato crop.⁷ The fungus continued to spread the following year destroying most of the crop. By 1847 (known as Black ’47) the entire crop was wiped out, leaving a full-fledged famine in its wake.⁸ The fungus continued to wipe out crops annually until 1852. Although there were relief efforts, an estimated one million people died due to starvation or related diseases due to the famine by 1851. Migration became the only solution for millions of Irish people.⁹ According to the Irish

¹ “A Remarkable Woman,” *The Pantagraph*, September 29, 1890.

² “Miss Trotter Dead,” *The Pantagraph*, February 8, 1904.

³ Pigot & Co., *City of Dublin and Hibernian Provincial Directory*, 1824. (source information provided by Barb Lancaster, Trotter descendant, 2024).

⁴ O’Boyle, Enda. *A History of Duleek*. (Duleek Historical Society, 1989); “Duleek Heritage Trail: Duleek Courthouse,” plaque erected by the Duleek Heritage Group. (source information provided by Barb Lancaster, Trotter descendant, 2024)

⁵ “Miss Trotter Dead.”

⁶ Greg Koos, “The Greening of the Prairie: Irish Migration and Settlement in McLean Co.” McLean County Museum of History

⁷ William E. Fry and Stephen B. Goodwin. *BioScience*, Vol. 47, No. 6 (Jun., 1997) p.363

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1313151>

⁸ Koos, “The Greening of the Prairie”

⁹ “Population and Expenditures,” Ireland’s Great Hunger Museum, <https://www.ighm.org/learn.html>, Accessed, June 13, 2024.

census of 1841, the population of Ireland was over eight million people. By 1851, the population should have increased to almost nine million, but instead plummeted to six million, meaning an estimated three million people were lost due to the famine (two million of whom emigrated from Ireland).¹⁰ Between 1851 and 1855 around 740,216 Irish migrated to the United States.¹¹ Trotter's father, who was probably tired of watching his tenants starve and his crops fail, packed up his family and moved to the United States where there would hopefully be better economic opportunities for them.¹²

Prior to Trotter's arrival in the U.S., her father died of cholera in 1849. This left Georgina's older brother, John Trotter, Jr., to be the one responsible for supporting the family. John set out to look for land near Woodford County and they settled in Palestine Township sometime in 1850. However, the area was not fully developed, and the Trotters were not suited for life on the open prairie.¹³ Eventually the family moved on to Bloomington by 1855, settling at a home located at the corner of Main and North Grove Streets.¹⁴ By 1866, the family made their home at the corner of Allen and Market Streets on Bloomington's west side.¹⁵

On April 14, 1861, the United States Civil War began with an attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina. Trotter answered the call of duty by enlisting as a nurse in the Union Army. She did so after attracting the attention of a Bloomington doctor, George Stipp.¹⁶ Together, they traveled to St. Louis and joined the Union cause.¹⁷ It appears that one of her first assignments was at the U.S.A. Post Hospital in Jefferson City, Missouri. Her work at the hospital began on November 1, 1861, and lasted until at least February 1862.¹⁸ This seems to support the account listed in her obituary that stated Trotter escorted wounded Union soldiers from the South to the North on riverboats as part of her duties as a nurse.¹⁹ It was said that she was one of the most trusted nurses on the hospital boats that ran up and down the Mississippi River, who were operated by Commodore Andrew Hull Foote.²⁰

Trotter also escorted wounded soldiers to hospitals at the Battle of Shiloh in Southwestern Tennessee, which was one of the first major battles of the Civil War in April 1862. The Union forces, under the command of General Ulysses S. Grant, were attacked by Confederate forces. After briefly retreating, the Union Army gained ground and pushed the Confederates back to Mississippi. Although both sides claimed victory, the 10,000 casualties suffered by both the North and South made it more of a stalemate.²¹

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Koos, "The Greening of the Prairie"

¹² Nola Marquardt, "Georgiana Trotter" (Researched 1998)

¹³ "James Trotter is Dead," *The Pantagraph*, January 25, 1907.

¹⁴ Marquardt, "Georgiana Trotter" and Martin Wykoff & Greg Koos. *Illustrated History of McLean County*. (Bloomington: Pantagraph Printing and Stationary, 1982) p. 133; Freese, J.R., *Bloomington City Directory, 1855*, p. 43.

¹⁵ Bailey and Hair. *A City Director of Bloomington, 1866*. (Chicago: J.C.W. Bailey, Book and Job Printer, 1866), 183.

¹⁶ "It is not generally known..." *The Pantagraph*, April 5, 1889.

¹⁷ Don Munson, *It is Begun! The Pantagraph Reports the Civil War*, (Bloomington: Pantagraph Printing and Stationary: 2001) p.41

¹⁸ U.S., Carded Service Records of Hospital Attendants, Matrons and Nurses, 1861-1865 for Georgiana Trotter, Ancestry.com, January 1862. Accessed April 25, 2024

¹⁹ "Miss Trotter's Dead"

²⁰ "After Life's Fitful Fever," *The Daily Bulletin*, February 8, 1904

²¹ "The Battle of Shiloh," <http://www.answers.com/topic/battle-of-shiloh> (September 14, 2011)

By January 1863, Trotter was stationed at Union Hotel U.S.A. General Hospital in Georgetown, located outside of Washington, D.C.²² Shortly before Trotter was transferred there, Dr. George Stipp (whom she traveled with to St. Louis to begin her medical service in the Union Army) was put in charge of that hospital.²³

At the beginning of the war, the Federal Government was lacking in a sufficient number of hospitals to care for the influx of wounded. There were no general hospitals at that time, only post hospitals that were “habitually small in size.” The largest of those post hospitals was located at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas and had forty beds.²⁴ In order to accommodate the massive numbers of sick and wounded that began pouring in from battlefields, the government quickly began to establish general hospitals by commandeering buildings such as hotels, seminaries, jails, warehouses, and factories to turn into makeshift hospitals. Unfortunately, the buildings that were seized were not equipped with the necessities to make a suitable hospital, most importantly, a sterile workspace. These structures were hardly adequate to give the sick and wounded soldiers proper care, “but were the best the government could provide on such short notice.”²⁵

Union Hotel Hospital was located on the northeast corner of Bridge and Washington Streets in Georgetown, D.C. This former hotel was built in 1796 and hosted many past presidents and prominent figures in its heyday. The U.S. Government took control of the hotel on May 6, 1861 and the hotel began receiving patients on May 25 that same year.²⁶ The building was “an unsavory old three-storied building, with an unfortunate interior juxtaposition of latrines and kitchen which aggravated the already prevalent problems of disease,” making the hotel very unsuitable to being a hospital.²⁷ In fact, the Union Hotel Hospital was once known as the “Hurly Burly House” because of its extremely unclean environment, but government officials were desperate for hospitals, so these conditions were ignored.²⁸

Trotter worked there for several months. Nurses like her were responsible not only for washing, feeding, giving medicine, and preparing the wounded for surgery, but also reading to soldiers aloud, writing letters, and entertaining them day and night. While there, it is possible that Trotter also cared for author and poet Louisa May Alcott, who worked as a nurse at Union Hotel Hospital for six weeks until she contracted typhoid pneumonia towards the end of December 1862. Alcott was a patient until January 21, 1863, when her father came to the hospital to bring her home so she could recover.²⁹

By May 1863, Trotter was transferred to the U.S.A Hospital in New Haven, Connecticut where she continued to treat the soldiers who were wounded in battle. She worked at this hospital through the month of October that year.³⁰

²² U.S., Carded Service Records of Hospital Attendants, Matrons and Nurses, 1861-1865 for Georgiana Trotter, Ancestry.com, January 1863. Accessed April 25, 2024

²³ Emily Swartz and Candace Summers, Biography of Dr. George Stipp, 2011, www.mchistory.org. Accessed April 25, 2024, 4.

²⁴ John R. Brumgardt, *Civil War Nurse: The Diary and Letters of Hannah Ropes*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979) p.37-38

²⁵ Brumgardt, 38

²⁶ “Sanitary Commission Pennant Proclaimed Improved Conditions,” http://americancivilwar.com/sanitary_commission.html. Accessed April 26, 2024.

²⁷ Brumgardt, 39

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Swartz and Summers, “Biography of Dr. George Stipp,” 2011, 4.

³⁰ U.S., Carded Service Records of Hospital Attendants, Matrons and Nurses, 1861-1865 for Georgiana Trotter, Ancestry.com, May 1863 through September 1863. Accessed April 25, 2024

Sometime after October 1863, she was transferred to a hospital in New Orleans, Louisiana. Trotter was put in charge of securing supplies for the hospital. Prior to this, it had been very difficult to “secure the necessary supplies, medicines, etc... from the store houses of the various wards” at the hospital. She complained to Major General Benjamin Franklin Butler about the “annoying army red tape, stating that many soldiers were dying for lack of such medicine which was but a short distance away, but which was kept from use by red tape until too late.” Butler asked her what she would do about this problem. She replied that she “would lop the ears off a dozen or two of the idlers about here if they did not wake up and obey orders.” To which Butler replied, “Go ahead and do it. I appoint you in charge of the hospital stores.” After her appointment, there was no future trouble in securing the proper supplies to care for the sick and wounded Union soldiers.³¹ Dr. Stipp recalled that Trotter was a woman “who never failed to straighten out the most entangled hospital or sanitary skein.”³²

Additionally, while stationed in New Orleans, she was briefly assigned to serve on the U.S.A. Hospital Steamer, “N.W. Thomas.” Trotter was appointed to that position by Dorothea Dix, an activist and reformer who served as the Superintendent of Army Nurses for the Federal Government during the war. It was Dix who formalized the appointment of nurses during the Civil War (requiring female nurses to be between the ages of 35 and 50, that they only were allowed to wear long black or brown dresses with no jewelry, and to be “plain looking”).³³ Trotter served on that ship during the months of May and June in 1864.³⁴ It is not known where she spent the remaining year of service during the war.

Georgina’s brother, John, also briefly served in the war. He enlisted in Company B, First Regiment of the Illinois Militia on May 26, 1862. He served for 15 days and was charged with the duty of guarding prisoners of war at Camp Butler outside of Springfield, IL.

After the war ended on April 9, 1865, Trotter returned home and joined her brother John in his lumber, grain, and coal business, which he opened in 1866.³⁵ Their lumber and coal yard, *J.W. & G. Trotter Lumber & Grain Merchants*, was first located at 1302 West Market Street.³⁶ Trotter had a shrewd talent for business and proved a very successful asset for the company, so much so that by 1876, Georgina and her brother, John, were ready to expand. That year they purchased twelve lots of land “in the Park and Phelps’s addition to the City of Bloomington.” This encompassed the entire block northwest of the Market Street bridge of the Chicago and Alton Railroad, at the corner of Market Street and Western Avenue (1111 West Market Street).³⁷ *The Pantagraph* reported that the location was “a very convenient and advantageous one” because a spur track from the C & A railroad ran directly through the land, making it easier for

³¹ “After Life’s Fitful Fever”

³² “It is not generally known...”

³³ Alyssa Desrochers, “Dorothea Dix: Mental Health Reformer and Civil War Nurse,” 2012, <https://siarchives.si.edu/blog/dorothea-dix-mental-health-reformer-and-civil-war-nurse>. Accessed April 26, 2024.

³⁴ U.S., Carded Service Records of Hospital Attendants, Matrons and Nurses, 1861-1865 for Georgiana Trotter, Ancestry.com, May 1864. Accessed April 23, 2024.

³⁵ John Burnham, George P. Davis, and Ezra Prince. *Transactions of the McLean County Historical Society, Bloomington, Illinois, Volume II: School Record of McLean County with Other Papers*. “John W. Trotter,” by Ira Merchant. (Bloomington, IL: Pantagraph Printing and Stationary Co., 1903) p. 583

³⁶ Wykoff & Koos, p.133; Edward Arntzen, *Bloomington City Directory, 1872-1873* (Bloomington: Leader Printing Company, 1872), 93.

³⁷ “The well-known lumber and coal firm...,” *The Pantagraph*, October 2, 1876; David B. Gould. *Gould’s City Directory for 1878-1879 Bloomington and Normal*. (Bloomington: Leader Publishing, 1878), 220; *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1904*. (Bloomington: Pantagraph Printing & Stationary Company, 1904), 545.

their new expanded facility to receive shipments of lumber, and storing grain.³⁸ The Trotters expanded the company again when they purchased eleven lots of land in May 1885.³⁹

Trotter seemed to never tire; “she was a veritable steam engine of energy, and nothing could tire or affright her in the way of bodily exertions in the pursuit of many plans for the good of the city.”⁴⁰ In fact, when her brother John passed away in February 1892, he left the entire business to Georgina over their brother James. Under her leadership the company continued to thrive. Georgina’s talents for business were sought out by other local businessmen who came to her for advice, establishing her ability as a woman capable of running a profitable company on her own.⁴¹

Trotter also concerned herself with the railroads in Bloomington. When there was question as to whether the Chicago and Alton shops should stay open (most likely due to several years of fires and the cost to rebuild each time), she roused the citizens of Bloomington to support the railroad. As a businesswoman she knew the importance of the railroad to her own business and to an industrial city as a whole.⁴² They were central to the commerce and future growth of the city. Also, she understood that if there was an increase in population, there would be improvements in education with possible higher student enrollment. In a 1904 interview with *The Pantagraph* several weeks before she became ill, Trotter suggested that the matter be settled, meaning that the railroads must remain in Bloomington.⁴³

On April 6, 1874, she became involved in the educational matters of Bloomington as the first woman elected to the Bloomington Board of Education even though, as a woman, she did not have the right to vote.⁴⁴ She was also one of the first women in the United States to serve on a school board. According to *The Pantagraph*, “no election for members of the Board of Education that has ever been held in Bloomington has excited so much interest...the cause of this was doubtless not that issues more important than common involved or that party or clique had entered into the struggle, but that a woman, Miss Georgina Trotter, had entered the lists as a candidate.”⁴⁵ In the days leading up to the election, *The Pantagraph* reported that the time had come “when public opinion recognizes the fitness of woman to occupy positions of trust and responsibility, especially in the education of youth.” Furthermore, *The Pantagraph* proclaimed that because she possessed rare business qualifications (for a woman), that “if elected [Trotter] will fulfill the duties of her office with ability, energy and prudence.”⁴⁶

Though she did not have a desire to be in public service, she could not refuse the position on the Board of Education. Trotter said in her letter of acceptance that a “conviction of duty and a high appreciation of your substantial and practical recognition of the rights of women compel me to accept the invitation which you have generously extended.”⁴⁷ She served on the board for fifteen years (five consecutive terms), right alongside Sarah Raymond, a close friend who was appointed the Superintendent of Public Schools in Bloomington that same year.

³⁸ “The well-known lumber and coal firm...”

³⁹ “Mr. John W. and Miss Georgina Trotter...,” *The Pantagraph*, May 7, 1885.

⁴⁰ “Miss Trotter is Dead”

⁴¹ Marquardt, “Georgiana Trotter”

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Miss Trotter is Dead”

⁴⁴ “Jacoby, Marsh, Trotter,” *The Pantagraph*, April 7, 1874; “City Council,” *The Weekly Leader*, April 15, 1874.

⁴⁵ “Jacoby, Marsh, Trotter.”

⁴⁶ “The New Departure,” *The Pantagraph*, April 1, 1874.

⁴⁷ Monica Noraian. *Women’s Rights, Racial, Integration and Education from 1850-1920.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)p.76

Trotter, and her friend Sarah Raymond, had an uphill battle to prove they were worthy of these positions to members of the community. Some individuals were opposed to women (childless women for that matter), running the schools, when these offices had traditionally been held by men.⁴⁸

As a member of the school board, Trotter implemented many changes that improved the education of the children of Bloomington. In March of 1875, she suggested the idea of shortening the course of high school “from six to three years, or at least to a shorter time than six years.” Trotter claimed that the course, as it was then, “was too complete—far beyond that contemplated by the law.” She stated that very few students who entered high school completed the necessary course. Trotter also noted that the incoming class of high school students for the 1874-75 school year was 75 students, but only 7 students would be graduating. She felt that if some of the course work was moved to the ward schools that it would reduce pressure on the high school, encouraging more students to graduate and reducing expenses too.⁴⁹

Trotter and the rest of the board wasted no time in implementing this change. The proposal was given to the high school committee to study this matter. The following month, the committee reported back, stating that state law only required “a good practical business education at public expense,” and that the course work created by their predecessors included “many branches of science that are far above the requirements of our practical business men.” It was their recommendation that students who wished to take classes above and beyond what the state required, should do so at their own expense. Therefore, the committee recommended that “two terms in Algebra, one term in Geometry, one term in Trigonometry, one and a half terms in Philosophy, one term in Rhetoric, and two terms in English Analysis” be dropped from the high school curriculum, which would be less burden on students and save the district money.⁵⁰

Members of the school board debated the pros and cons of this issue throughout the summer. A decision on whether to cut one or two years off the high school course of study still had not been reached by June that year.⁵¹ By the July meeting, the board and Superintendent Raymond had solidified a plan to cut the high school curriculum from six years down to three years. Many of the courses that were proposed earlier to be cut remained in the new course guide, just spread out between grammar school and high school. Students were also given the option to add German and Latin at the high school level.⁵² The new course guidelines were implemented for the 1875-76 school year.

In October 1876, Trotter made a motion that the committee on school examiners be instructed to inquire into the possibility of opening an evening school, which would benefit those individuals who are “compelled to labor during the day.” Her fellow board members wholeheartedly endorsed this idea and instructed the school examiners committee to look into the feasibility of putting the plan into action by November 1. It appears that the evening school was started, as there is mention of the appointment of new teachers for the school in December 1877.⁵³

As a testament to her popularity and the respect she had earned from the community, Trotter was called upon to run for a second term on the school board in 1877. It was noted in *The*

⁴⁸ “The Board Election,” *The Pantagraph*, April 3, 1886.

⁴⁹ “Our Schools,” *The Pantagraph*, March 2, 1875.

⁵⁰ “Our Schools,” *The Pantagraph*, April 6, 1875.

⁵¹ “The School Bosses,” *The Pantagraph*, Jun 8, 1875.

⁵² “Work Enough for All,” *The Pantagraph*, August 18, 1875; “Our Schools,” *The Pantagraph*, June 15, 1875.

⁵³ “Schools and Scholars,” *The Pantagraph*, December 4, 1877.

Pantagraph, that she had demonstrated “her fitness for the position,” and that “her services certainly deserve recognition, and the people could do no better or wiser thing than re-elect her.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, it was noted that Trotter had “displayed rare ability in the management of public affairs, and has fully demonstrated the fact that a woman is not out of place on boards of public management.”⁵⁵ Trotter, expressing her gratitude for the confidence of the community in her abilities, had not wished to run again. However, she felt duty bound because the community desired her to.⁵⁶ As a result, she was once again elected to a three-year term on the board, receiving 1,479 votes.⁵⁷ Reports of her successful reelection found their way into newspapers on the East Coast, including the *Port Chester Journal* in Port Chester, New York. An article about “Successful Women,” complemented both Trotter and her dear friend, Superintendent Raymond, on their work in Bloomington Public Schools, noting that Trotter was “not only one of the shrewdest of financiers, but a leading member of the city Board of Education.”⁵⁸

Throughout her time on the school board, Trotter served on a variety of committees. During her first term (1874-1877) she was the head of the committee on Janitors and Supplies. This included securing coal for all the schoolhouses to use when the weather turned cold in the fall and winter months. On July 3, 1876, Geogina reported that she was having difficulty with the McLean County Coal Company, who was refusing to sign the contract for half of the coal called for because they had bid to supply “no more or less than 600 tons of coal to schools.”⁵⁹ However, an agreement must have been reached for the desired amount of coal because it was reported that the McLean County Coal Company was filling up the coal bins at the various school-houses a week later.⁶⁰ Each time the board made plans and preparations for the new school years, Trotter was not only charged with obtaining bids for coal to prepare the schools for the winter months, but as head of the Janitors and Supplies committee, she also sought bids for stationary items such as pens, pencils, paper, notebooks, and rubber bands that would be needed by teachers and students alike throughout the school year.⁶¹

During her second term, in addition to being the head of the Janitors and Supplies Committee, she was also appointed to the School Buildings and Grounds committee and the Finance and Auditing Committee.⁶² Right before the beginning of the 1879-1880 school year, as the head of the Janitors and Supplies Committee, Trotter had the important task to have the furnaces at all of the schools evaluated. The report she presented to the full board found that the furnaces at five of the school buildings needed to be overhauled or completely replaced. Her committee’s findings brought about much discussion and debate from her fellow (male) board members as to if all of this expenditure would be necessary. Trotter did not back down and eventually the rest of the board members fell in line and voted to authorize her committee to seek bids for the project to be completed.⁶³

⁵⁴ “Miss Trotter For Member of the Board of Education,” *The Pantagraph*, March 13, 1877.

⁵⁵ “Items,” *The Pantagraph*, March 17, 1877.

⁵⁶ “Miss Trotter Accepts,” *The Pantagraph*, March 17, 1877.

⁵⁷ “Josie and I Are Out,” *The Pantagraph*, April 3, 1877.

⁵⁸ “Successful Women,” *The Port Chester Journal*, April 12, 1877.

⁵⁹ “Educational Plank,” *The Pantagraph*, July 4, 1876.

⁶⁰ “The City,” *The Pantagraph*, July 12, 1876.

⁶¹ “Bids for Stationary,” *The Pantagraph*, June 27, 1881; “Sealed Proposals,” *The Pantagraph*, June 30, 1882

⁶² “Bloomington’s Schools,” *The Pantagraph*, September 10, 1877.

⁶³ “The Council of Seven,” *The Pantagraph*, August 5, 1879; “Bids for Repairing Furnaces,” *The Pantagraph*, August 9, 1879.

In 1880, the citizens of Bloomington once again called upon Trotter to run for re-election for a seat on the school board. And once again, she was a reluctant candidate. A group of leading men of the city authored a letter calling for her to accept their nomination to run for the Board of Education again. In it, they said that her further services were indispensable to the success of Bloomington Public Schools.⁶⁴ Trotter, reluctantly capitulated to their will, stating that she was deeply grateful for their confidence in her abilities, and would name herself as a candidate once again.⁶⁵ For a third time in a row, she was elected to a three-year term on the Board of Education.⁶⁶

As the school board began to work on plans for the 1885-86 school year, the topic of teacher salaries came up for discussion. Salary increases were recommended to several groups of educators including high school teachers (from \$55.00 to \$57.50 per month), principals at schools number 1-4 and Jefferson School (from \$75.00 to \$80.00 per month) and raising the principal of the high school, Professor John W. Heninger's, salary from \$111.11 to \$122.22 per month. When the recommendation from the committee on teachers came to the full board, board member Francis Funk was firmly opposed to any increase for teachers, except for Professor Heninger. Funk stated that "while he did not wish to oppress anyone in the matter of compensation for services," he felt it was not proper for an increase. He stated that the cost of living was relatively cheap, and anything teachers needed they could readily buy. Trotter rebuffed Funk by stating that "to increase Prof. Heninger's pay and not increase the pay of lady teachers recommended would be an injustice totally unworthy of the board."⁶⁷ Unfortunately, all of the other male board members supported Funk's stance. They felt that Heninger's salary needed to be raised in order to not lose his services. Thus, the female teachers did not receive any raise for the coming school year.⁶⁸

Another major accomplishment of Trotter's tenure on the board was that she saved the school district a "good deal of money" in the construction of new buildings and renovations of others due to her business savvy. Because of a steady increase in Bloomington's population, the existing schools were overcrowded. This meant it was difficult for teachers to meet the needs of all the students and made for a challenging learning environment for the students. To continue to meet the educational needs of the students in Bloomington Public Schools, five school buildings were constructed between 1877 and 1888 while Trotter was on the board (Market School on Mason and Market streets in 1877, Jefferson School at the corner of Jefferson and Clayton streets in 1879, School #6 was rebuilt and expanded in 1879, School #4 at Evans and Taylor streets in 1884, and the Raymond School on the 1400 block of West Olive Street in 1888).⁶⁹

Trotter and Sarah Raymond did much to improve the schools. In addition to the before mentioned successes, their efforts added more classrooms and almost completely eliminated corporal punishment (a form punishment in which a rod, cane, or paddle was used to hit a student).⁷⁰ And by 1881, the school district's debt was completely gone. Trotter's business sense helped keep the school district out of debt during her tenure in office.⁷¹ Overall she witnessed

⁶⁴ "To Jacob Jacoby, Esq. and Miss Georgiana Trotter," *The Pantagraph*, March 31, 1880.

⁶⁵ "Miss Trotter Accepts," *The Pantagraph*, April 3, 1880.

⁶⁶ "The Election Yesterday," *The Pantagraph*, April 6, 1880.

⁶⁷ "Our Schools," *The Pantagraph*, June 9, 1885.

⁶⁸ "The Teachers," *The Pantagraph*, June 11, 1885.

⁶⁹ Brigham, William. *The Story of McLean County And Its Schools*. (Bloomington: McLean County Historical Society, 1951), 44-45.

⁷⁰ Noraian, p.89

⁷¹ "Miss Trotter," *The Daily Bulletin*, February 8, 1904

1,637 graduates and 40,000 pupils during her 15 years on the school board.⁷² Trotter retired from office in 1889 due to ill health.⁷³

While Trotter's time on the school board was filled with many successes and improvements, she experienced a particularly challenging situation and dark time during her first term on the board; when a student named Harry Bryant took his own life.

Before noon on July 2, 1876, 15-year-old Harry Bryant took his own life by shooting himself in the head in the basement of his parent's home on South Lee Street.⁷⁴ According to a special statement (given to the press) written by his mother, Mrs. Thomas Bryant, she blamed, what she called, "his school degradation" was what had killed him. "That his noble aspirations were crushed by the actions of the superintendent (Sarah Raymond), his principal, and his teacher as he prepared to enter the high school."⁷⁵ According to his mother, Harry passed the exam for entrance into high school on June 15, 1875. He examined with the class ahead of him and received a full certificate to enter high school. Mrs. Bryant stated that her son came home delighted and triumphant over his year of hard work. When the new school year began that fall, Harry appeared to be struggling with his classwork at the high school level, possibly because he was a year ahead of what he should have been. According to Mrs. Bryant, Harry's teacher, Mrs. Anderson, "poorly managed the class" and more than half of the class failed. Mrs. Bryant claimed that Mrs. Anderson did not talk to her about Harry falling behind, and that he was at threat of being put back in the ward schools. Mrs. Bryant stated that Mrs. Anderson had only warned Harry once that he was in danger of falling behind.

Unfortunately, Harry was "degraded" and sent back to the Third Ward School. According to his mother, he was humiliated and inconsolable. His new teacher, Mrs. Johnson, worked with Harry for a time to help him improve. And after working with him, Mrs. Johnson "found him entirely above grade" and that he "was far superior" to be in the ward school.⁷⁶ Despite his improvements, Harry was denied a second chance to be back in the high school ahead of his grade (denied by the Miss Dunn, the high school principal, and Superintendent Raymond). After his denial, Harry came home in utter anguish, saying he had disgraced his family and wanted to die. Mrs. Bryant assured her son that the ward school would gladly receive him and that he could continue working hard to get back into the high school. But Harry felt he would disgrace the ward school too. An additional blow to Harry was the fact that his teacher, Mrs. Johnson (who said she could work with him to get him back into the high school) was removed from her position by Superintendent Raymond. And, according to his mother, the two teachers that Harry had afterwards, did not give Harry the attention he needed, so he lost interest in his schoolwork at the ward school.⁷⁷

At the end of the school year, Harry attempted to take the exam for admission into the high school once again. But he encountered students who were four grades behind him trying to test into the high school. All of the degradation Harry suffered seemed to come back to him and his exam proved a failure in two studies. Despite this, he did receive his diploma and graduated to the high school. However, Harry vowed to not go to the high school based on the treatment he received the first time from that "petty high school" as he called it.

⁷² "Close of a Career," *The Pantagraph* (Date Unknown)

⁷³ Noraian, 76.

⁷⁴ "A Boy's Suicide," *The Pantagraph*, July 3, 1876; "Harry Bryant's Suicide," *The Pantagraph*, July 18, 1876.

⁷⁵ "The Bryant Case," *The Pantagraph*, July 19, 1876.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

According to Mrs. Bryant, all of this was preventable. She demanded the removal of Superintendent Raymond (along with her son's teacher Mrs. Anderson, and the high school principal, Miss Dunn). She added that she had received no "words of regret" or sympathy from Raymond, Anderson, or Dunn. And that the only person that she had heard from, was Harry's "noble teacher," Mrs. Johnson.⁷⁸

Two members of the Board of Education signed on for the call to hold a special meeting of the board on July 17, 1876, to hear the statement of Bryant's parents. However, there was not a quorum of board members in attendance to hold the meeting. Board member Jacob Jacoby stated that Mrs. Bryant could give the statement to the three board members present (plus Superintendent Raymond). However, Mrs. Bryant refused to entrust the statement to the board or read it to those present at the meeting, and instead turned it over to members of the press. Trotter was not able to attend this meeting.⁷⁹

At the regular August meeting of the school board, Raymond presented a statement to the board. She called upon evidence that the boy's doctor, Dr. William Hill, had examined Bryant two days before he took his own life. She stated that it was Dr. Hill's opinion that Bryant had been suffering from "mental aberration," the cause of which was not known. And it was the boy's parents who unjustly blamed her, the schools, and the board for their son's untimely death.⁸⁰ Additionally, Raymond stated that the decision to move Bryant back to the ward school was based on his performance in class, stating that he was performing poorly. She and Bryant's teacher were only doing what they felt was best for him. Raymond stated that she "had no feeling against Harry, but had the opposite, sympathized for him and his family." She also stated that there had been no application made for a new high school entrance exam for Bryant. Thus, the matter appears to have been closed as no further information was presented to the school board after the September 1876 meeting.⁸¹

Trotter and Raymond "worked side by side to improve the lives of others in the community through their social and professional lives."⁸² Their hard work is evident as they worked together to develop Bloomington's public library—Withers Public Library. Not only did Trotter contribute funds to help construct the building, but she helped solicit donations from other members of the community to raise the necessary funds to construct the library. She also lent her business sense to the administration of the library.

This library was a continuation of the first library which had been opened in 1857 in a single room on Center Street by the Ladies' Library Association. The library relocated in 1871 to a hall at 105 West North Street, but closed in 1880 due to lack of funding.⁸³

After Sarah Withers, another prominent woman in Bloomington, donated land to the library association in 1882, Trotter and Raymond lead the efforts to secure funds and members. In March of that year, Trotter and Raymond were elected officers of the Bloomington Library Association (with Trotter being one of the managers and Raymond serving as the president of the association) and they began their work.⁸⁴ They also served on the soliciting committee to raise

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ "Harry Bryant's Suicide."

⁸⁰ "The Harry Bryant Case Again," *The Weekly Leader*, August 17, 1876; "The Bryant Suicide," *The Pantagraph*, August 22, 1876.

⁸¹ "The Irrepressible Conflicts," *The Pantagraph*, September 26, 1876.

⁸² Monica Noraian. Master's Thesis: *Sarah Raymond Fitzwilliam* (Illinois State University:2007)

⁸³ "Bloomington Public Library Historical Timeline," http://www.bloomingtonlibrary.org/find/library_history/ (September 16, 2011)

⁸⁴ "Annual Meeting," *The Pantagraph*, March 6, 1882.

enough funds to build the library, which were initially estimated to be \$15,000 (or \$496,000 in 2023).⁸⁵ When the cornerstone for the library was laid on May 26, 1887, the efforts of Trotter and Raymond were noted in the local newspapers, one of which stated that their “indefatigable efforts” ensured the necessary funds were raised to construct the library, and they would maintain “a warm place in the hearts of every resident of Bloomington who has a tender side for books.”⁸⁶ By the time the cornerstone was laid, Trotter and Raymond helped to raise over \$9,000.⁸⁷ After months of construction, the public library reopened (named Withers Public Library), on December 27 and was located on the corner of East and Washington Streets. When the library opened its doors, Trotter and Raymond had raised \$15,000 (though additional funds were needed because the final construction cost was \$20,500).⁸⁸ The library remained at that location for 89 years. In 1977 a new public library opened on Olive Street in Bloomington. Today, there is a fountain dedicated to the Trotter Family in Wither’s Park, next to the site of Withers Library.⁸⁹

That fountain was made possible by a bequest in Georgina’s brother, James’, will. When he passed away in 1907, his will left instructions “for the erection of a \$5,000 fountain in one of the city’s public parks as a memorial” to his family.⁹⁰ The logical place for the erection of that fountain was in a lot next to Withers Library because of Georgina’s heavy involvement with the establishment of the library. As with Georgina’s will, Sarah Raymond Fitzwilliam served as the executrix of James’ estate too. Like with any project she was given, Fitzwilliam worked hard to carry out the wishes of the family whom she was so close to.

In 1909, she secured Lorado Taft, one of the leading American sculptors of the 20th century, to design the fountain.⁹¹ At the time, Taft was living in Chicago and teaching at the Art Institute and the University of Chicago. Fitzwilliam, who was also living in Chicago at the time, may have had contact with Taft as she was an active member of the Art Institute.⁹² The fountain was carved from Georgia marble, and decorated with scenes animals and Indigenous people. On the fountain’s east and west sides, Indigenous women with urns resting on their right shoulders are seen. When the fountain is in operation, water pours from the urns into basins at the base of the fountain. An Indigenous child rests to the left of each woman. The north side of the fountain features a dog and the south side a bear cub standing on its hind legs.⁹³ The fountain was not carved by Taft himself, rather, assistants from his Chicago studio. The fountain was still incomplete when it was dedicated on May 30, 1911. It was completed for a cost of \$7,000 (about \$242,000 in 2023), which meant the additional \$2,000 had to be raised by the committee that was tasked with overseeing the project. Taft’s assistant, Walter Zimmerman, spent two months in Bloomington completing the fountain after the dedication ceremony.⁹⁴

Trotter also lent her financial skills to the Bloomington Benevolent Society. Founded in 1884, the society was organized with the goal of helping “the poor and destitute” of Bloomington. She was one of the founding members and served as treasurer that first year. Members of the society

⁸⁵ “The New Library Building,” *The Pantagraph*, June 1, 1882; Measuringworth.com, date accessed August 5, 2024.

⁸⁶ “The Library Building,” *The Weekly Leader*, May 26, 1887.

⁸⁷ “Library Day,” *The Weekly Leader*, May 26, 1887.

⁸⁸ “A Home At Last,” *The Weekly Pantagraph*, December 30, 1887.

⁸⁹ “Bloomington Public Library Historical Timeline”

⁹⁰ “Bequest Left by James Trotter,” *The Weekly Pantagraph*, February 1, 1907.

⁹¹ “Trotter Fountain To Be By Lorado Taft,” *The Pantagraph*, July 30, 1909.

⁹² Noraian, 77.

⁹³ Kemp, Bill. “Trotter Fountain work of Lorado Taft,” *The Pantagraph*, February 10, 2006.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*; Measuringworth.com, date accessed August 6, 2024.

were called upon to collect money, clothing, fuel, and provisions from the citizens of Bloomington to help those who were less fortunate in the city.⁹⁵ Members of the society were divided into committees and each committee was assigned to each fundraise in a different ward in Bloomington.⁹⁶ Within the first week, Trotter had collected over \$50 from two churches and one local physician.⁹⁷ One of the society's meetings was held in the high school building in Superintendent Raymond's office during that first year. It is not known how long Trotter was affiliated with this organization, but by the end of 1884, she was no longer serving as treasurer or assigned to a ward committee.⁹⁸

Georgina Trotter and Sarah Raymond Fitzwilliam had a strong and committed friendship. There is no concrete evidence, such as correspondence between the two friends exists, and one can only speculate as to the true nature of their relationship. What is known is that in addition to their long tenure on the Bloomington Board of Education together, their service on the Bloomington Library Association board, and participation in a variety of other community activities in Bloomington, Sarah accompanied Georgina to New York to bring Georgina's brother, John, home to Bloomington after he became very ill while traveling in France in 1889.⁹⁹ In an April 1886 *Pantagraph* article, the author referred to Georgina as "being the particular and personal friend of Miss Raymond, superintendent of schools for many years."¹⁰⁰ Another article in that same April 1886 edition of *The Pantagraph* referred to Georgina as "the bosom friend of the superintendent."¹⁰¹ Sarah lived at the same address as Georgina did, 801 W. Market Street, in 1891.¹⁰² Sarah also served as the executrix of Georgina's estate when Georgina died in 1904, and was buried in the Trotter family plot upon her death in 1918.¹⁰³

Georgina never married and neither did her brothers John (who served three terms as mayor of Bloomington) and James. She was considered to be a master of the English language and her impromptu speeches at gatherings were fondly remembered. Georgina also organized lecture series in town which brought great literary minds to the city. Unlike many women at the time, Georgina was also a talented horsewoman and enjoyed friends accompanying her in her sleigh or carriage.¹⁰⁴

Even though she never had children of her own, Trotter became a "mother" to a girl named Bessie Becker whom she took in at the age of three. It is not known why she did this as Bessie had family members living in town. However, in 1888, Trotter began assisting a German woman and her four small children. The woman and her husband came to Pittsburg from Germany in July 1887, and a few days after their arrival, he became ill and died.¹⁰⁵ The woman appealed to a "distant relative" who worked for the Trotter family for assistance. Georgina Trotter set about to provide for them, lining up an apartment in the basement of Withers Public Library. With the assistance of friends, Trotter gathered donations to set up an apartment for the woman and her four children. Trotter also lined up a list of customers for the woman so that she could commence

⁹⁵ "Helping The Poor," *The Pantagraph*, January 25, 1884.

⁹⁶ "Worthy Organized Benevolence," *The Pantagraph*, January 31, 1884.

⁹⁷ "Worthy Work," *The Pantagraph*, January 30, 1884.

⁹⁸ "The Winter's Charity," *The Weekly Leader*, December 18, 1884.

⁹⁹ "Hon. John W. Trotter Home," *The Pantagraph*, August 14, 1889.

¹⁰⁰ "Who is Who?" *The Pantagraph*, April 3, 1886.

¹⁰¹ "The Board Election."

¹⁰² Noraian, 78.

¹⁰³ Noraian, 78-79.

¹⁰⁴ Marquardt, "Georgiana Trotter"

¹⁰⁵ "Quiet Charity Work," *The Pantagraph*, January 12, 1888.

with work as a laundress.¹⁰⁶ One hypothesis could be that this family consisted of Bessie's mother and siblings. This remains unproven, however, as there is not enough evidence to support the claim. Something could have happened to Bessie's mother, and Bessie and her siblings would have needed someone to care for them, with Georgina taking Bessie in to raise her on her own.

Trotter cared for her as a mother would have and "gave her the best education obtainable and spared nothing that would promote the welfare and accomplishment of the young girl."¹⁰⁷ Bessie later worked for the Trotter Lumber and Coal Yard as a bookkeeper. Upon Trotter's death, Bessie assisted Sarah Raymond Fitzwilliam in finding a buyer for the company. Bessie then left the Trotter home and moved to her sibling's home in Bloomington. She eventually married an insurance agent, Robert Kreplin.¹⁰⁸

Not only did Trotter care for Bessie, but she was kind to many of the poor and needy in the community. Many of her friends recalled that she had "probably assisted more poor people to build houses than any other person in Central Illinois." Come Christmas time, the children of her friends always found gifts from her, especially those children from poorer families.¹⁰⁹

After she retired from the School Board, Trotter devoted her attention to her lumber, grain, and coal business, and built a large number of houses for tenants, including herself. Two years prior to her death, Georgina and her brother James began building a fine new home at 701 West Market Street. Their previous home, located at 801 West Market Street, had been one of a number of houses sold to make way for the new Edwards School site.¹¹⁰ As they waited for their new home to be completed, Georgina and James lived in a six-room cottage they built at 506 North Mason Street, directly behind the site of their future home at 701 West Market Street.¹¹¹ Unfortunately, Georgina did not live long enough to occupy the new house on West Market Street.¹¹² Georgina and her brother were making preparations to move into the house the week of her death, as the structure was nearing completion and most of the furnishings had been purchased.¹¹³

Georgina Trotter died in the cottage on North Mason Street on February 6, 1904 after a brief illness brought on by a stroke.¹¹⁴ Although her death seemed imminent, residents of Bloomington were still shocked and saddened. Her funeral was held at the family home and St. Matthew's Church in Bloomington. *The Pantagraph* called her "one of the most remarkable women Bloomington has ever claimed as a citizen."¹¹⁵ Georgina was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, IL.

Sarah Raymond Fitzwilliam served as executrix of her estate. Charged with this duty, Fitzwilliam paid bills, collected debts, and kept the Lumber Company running until she found a buyer.¹¹⁶ In an extended trip to Ireland, Fitzwilliam even visited the site of Trotter's home and

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ "After Life's Fitful Fever"

¹⁰⁸ Nola Marquardt. "Bertha (Bessie) M. Becker;" "Notes of the Day," *The Pantagraph*, May 31, 1911.

¹⁰⁹ "After Life's Fitful Fever."

¹¹⁰ *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1902*, 503.

¹¹¹ "Will Build New Residence," *The Pantagraph*, October 10, 1902.

¹¹² "Miss Trotter"

¹¹³ "To Petition for Administrator," *The Bulletin*, 1904.

¹¹⁴ "Funeral Notice," *The Pantagraph*, February 8, 1904; Her obituary incorrectly lists her residence at the time of her death as 710 North Mason Street, Bloomington.

¹¹⁵ "Miss Trotter Dead"

¹¹⁶ Nola Marquardt, "Georgina Trotter's Estate," (May 5, 1998)

visited with Trotter family cousins.¹¹⁷ As a testament to their close relationship, when Fitzwilliam passed away in 1918 she was buried next to Georgina Trotter at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, IL.

By: Emily Swartz, 2011

Edits and additions: Candace Summers, 2024

¹¹⁷ Noraian, *Sarah Raymond Fitzwilliam*, Master Thesis