

Judith Ann Major Allin Bradner (1814-1912)

Judith Major Allin Bradner was born on May 9, 1814, in Bourbon County, Kentucky, to William T. and Margaret (Shipp) Major. In 1834, her father and his brothers decided to leave their plantation in Kentucky and move north after visiting central Illinois. During the trip, William bought 30 acres of land and a house in Bloomington, Illinois. In 1835, William and his family of 11, along with some cows and their first piano, began a 16-day journey to their new home. They sent most of their belongings by boat to Pekin, Illinois. Most of the family traveled in covered wagons, while Judith and two of her brothers rode on horseback. Judith remembered seeing wild fruit and nut trees growing everywhere, and how her horse's feet were covered in juice from wild strawberries as they traveled.

Her father, William T. Major, became an important figure in the community of Bloomington, which only had 450 people when they arrived. He helped start First Christian Church in 1837 and founded Major's College School for Girls, which operated from 1856 to 1879. He also built Major's Hall, where Illinois State Normal University held its first classes, and it was a meeting place for social and political events. Abraham Lincoln gave his famous "Lost Speech" at Major's Hall on May 29, 1856, which helped lead to the creation of the Republican Party.

In 1838, Judith married William H. Allin, the son of James Allin, who helped found Bloomington. Judith and her husband often hosted guests, especially lawyers who came to town for court. Abraham Lincoln was one of the lawyers who visited their home. Judith said that Lincoln was always full of life and fun. She enjoyed being part of her community and church social activities.

Her husband William owned land and ran a store for 19 years, first selling general goods and later dry goods. He supported Illinois State Normal University and Illinois Wesleyan University. He also helped create Franklin Park. Judith and William had five children, but after 21 years of marriage, William passed away in 1857.

Judith remained a widow for 20 years before marrying George Bradner in 1876. George was also a local merchant who sold hardware. Judith had known George and his first wife for many years before his wife passed away. Judith and George went on their honeymoon to the Philadelphia Exposition in 1876, which was a celebration of the United States' 100th anniversary. After 20 years of marriage, George passed away on December 31, 1896. Judith then lived with her son, Edwin, at their home on Jefferson Street.

Judith was known for being active in her community. She sold a block of land to build the county jail and built a store on North Main Street. She also enjoyed participating in sewing bees and spent her time knitting and quilting. In her later years, Judith was interviewed by *The Pantagraph*, where she shared memories of her pioneer life in Bloomington. These interviews are important records of the area's history.

Judith remained active and sharp until she passed away on February 28, 1912, at the age of 98. A special memorial service was held for her at the First Christian Church, where she had been a charter member. Her books were donated to the McLean County Historical Society, including an 1766 edition of Homer's *Iliad* and a book from the 1814 New York Exposition. She was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

Her home, built by her first husband's father, James Allin, was sold for \$7,000 two years after her death to George Gildner. It was described as one of the oldest and finest homes in the area.