

Julia Green Scott (1839-1923)

Julia Green Scott was born to privilege and distinguished ancestry on February 14, 1839 in Danville, Kentucky. She was the daughter of Rev. Lewis Warner, a renowned Southern preacher and president of Centre College in Danville, and Mary Peachy Fry Green. Julia descended from a line of famous and distinguished people. She was a direct decent from the family of George Washington on both sides. Her great-grandfather was James Speed, a captain in the Revolutionary War. Some other ancestors were Joseph Fry, a young man who fought in the Revolutionary War, and Dr. Thomas Walker, a close friend of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.¹ She attended one of the finest Eastern finishing schools in New York and went on to excel in the life into which she was born.

Julia married Matthew T. Scott of Lexington, Kentucky on May 12, 1859. She met Matthew while he was attending Centre College. Her father had been the president there since 1855. Together they moved to the Central Illinois prairie where they were among the first residents and founders of the town of Chenoa.

Matthew, like his father before him, was a land speculator. His family had purchased large amounts of land in both Ohio and Illinois in the 1830s. After attending college, Matthew began to participate in land speculation with his brothers in the early 1850s.² Some of the first land he purchased was in Chenoa, IL. This land was particularly valuable because two railroads, the Chicago and Alton and the Toledo, Peoria and Warsaw, intersected there. This would be prime real-estate for Matthew. He soon began buying thousands of acres of land and eventually accumulated over 45,000 acres of land in Illinois, Iowa, and Tennessee.

However, Matthew did not just buy and sell land, he used funds from the sale of land to develop the best of his land holdings which was 5,000 acres of land in northern McLean County and southern Livingston County. This land was prairie and like much of the land in the area, was very fertile and favorable to growing corn. Before Matthew could start a crop, he had to further develop the land so it would be suitable for growing crops. This meant the land had to be “first drained, the sod broken, the fields fenced, and tenants placed on the farms.”³ Matthew accomplished this by putting advertisements in local newspapers such as the *Weekly Pantagraph* to attract tenants and farm laborers. He personally supervised these workers in their efforts to shape the land.

However, Chenoa did not prosper as the boomtown the Scotts had envisioned. They moved to Springfield in 1870 publicly because of Julia’s health, but it’s more likely that they moved because Julia was unhappy with Chenoa society. They continued to remain very active in the agricultural world and by this time, Matthew’s farms were so well organized that he did not need to directly oversee them anymore.⁴ He continued to manage his farms from afar until his death twenty-one years later.

¹ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, “Scott, Julia Green.” (New York: James T. White & Co., no date)

² Greg Koos. “Matthew T. Scott, Prairie Capitalist,” *Historic Illinois*. Illinois Department of Conservation, Division of Historic Sites, Volume 6, No. 4, December 1983. 2

³ Koos, 3

⁴ Koos, 6

Julia and Matthew then moved to Bloomington after their short stay in Springfield. While living in Bloomington, Matthew organized and became president of the McLean County Coal Company and saved it from failure. He also founded the Democratic newspaper, *The Bulletin*, in 1881.

In 1872 they purchased a home at 701 E. Taylor which was considered one of the most elegant homes of the day in Bloomington. Other stylish homes of the era were the David Davis Mansion, Asahel Gridley's "The Oaks", The Robinson House, and the Flagg Mansion.

Two daughters were born to Julia and Matthew in the 1870s: Letitia (known as "Lettie"), and Julia. After being married for thirty-two years, Matthew died on May 21, 1891. He was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.

Julia Green Scott was a very capable woman. After Matthew's death, she took charge of managing 9,000 acres of farmland in Illinois and Indiana as well as being the principal stockholder, and eventually president, of the McLean County Coal Company.⁵

Between April 1900 and October 1901 she expanded the family home on Taylor Street by adding 60% more floor space and added two new porches to the exterior of the house. Julia retained well known local architect Arthur Pillsbury to design the new additions.⁶ Some of the additions to the design and décor Julia added to the house included: yellowish tan paint to unify old and new facades, terra cotta capitals and sandstone columns and coping,⁷ carved red oak ornament and paneling, Tiffany stained glass windows bearing the family coat of arms near the staircase leading to the second floor, an enlarged and open parlor to entertain large numbers of guests, domed opalescent glass ceiling fixtures in the parlor, library, and dining room, electric lights with gas backups, a library with cherry paneling and cabinets with leaded glass doors, and her office which was complete with a large wall safe with her name painted on it.⁸ These additions cost over \$10,000, which would be almost \$250,000 in 2008.

At various times, her social circle reached to the upper echelons of the nation. Her sister Letitia married Adlai Stevenson I, Vice President of the United States to Grover Cleveland. Julia's son-in-law, Carl Vrooman, was Assistant Secretary of Agriculture during President Woodrow Wilson's administration. Articles appeared in both *The Bulletin* and *The Pantagraph* describing the parties, receptions, and functions taking place at her Taylor Street residence. They often included a description of the flowers or other décor in place for the occasion as well as the guests who attended. On one such occasion, Julia hosted a reception at her home on October 29, 1901. She and the other members of the Letitia Green Stevenson chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (named for her sister who founded the local chapter in 1894) welcomed visiting officers from other chapters of the N.S.D.A.R from across the country. The entire house was decorated in red, white, and blue with over 300

⁵ "Mrs. M.T. Scott is Claimed by Death," *The Daily Pantagraph*, April 30, 1923

⁶ United States Department of the Interior National Park Service National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Nomination Form, December 1973

⁷ United States Department of the Interior National Park Service National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Nomination Form, December 1973

⁸ Various authors, *The Scott-Vrooman Mansion Benefit Tour*. (Bloomington, IL: Illinois Graphics Inc., 1985) 16-37

guests attending. The reception was reported by *The Bulletin* in which it was stated that the house was “so spacious and admirably devised that there was no crush.”⁹

Julia was a very active member of society. She was a member of several organizations including the Peace Commission of the Washington D.C. Federation of Women’s Clubs as well as the Women’s Council of George Washington University. She was perhaps best known for her heavy involvement with the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (N.S.D.A.R.).¹⁰ The N.S.D.A.R. was founded in 1890 as a healing gesture after the Civil War. It was incorporated by Congress in 1896. Letitia Green Stevenson, Julia’s sister, was a founding member of the national organization and its third president.

Julia made many contributions to the N.S.D.A.R. She was elected vice-president general in 1901 and held that office for four years. In 1909 she was elected president general after barely defeating her opponent, Mrs. William Cummings Story in a highly publicized election.¹¹ During her tenure in office, Memorial Continental Hall was dedicated as the N.S.D.A.R. headquarters in Washington, D.C. in 1910. President Taft gave the opening address at the dedication ceremony. It was a large and beautiful Corinthian-style building made of white marble from Vermont. The most prominent feature of the structure was a colonnade of thirteen pillars on the front which represented the thirteen original colonies. This monument still stands today, dedicated to all men and women who helped achieve independence for the United States.¹² Julia also traveled around the country recruiting members and giving speeches promoting the N.S.D.A.R. During Julia’s time in office, the membership of the N.S.D.A.R. increased by 7,000. The organization’s financial status was strengthened as well. Upon the expiration of her second term in 1919 she was elected honorary president general, a position she retained until her death.¹³

As president of the War Relief Committee for the N.S.D.A.R. during World War I, she led the crusade to raise money for the benefit of French war orphans. Her efforts were acknowledged in 1921 when the French ambassador, M. Jusserand, presented Julia with The Medal of French Gratitude of the First Class in recognition of her work raising money to rehabilitate the French town of Tilloloy and the adoption of 4,000 war orphans.¹⁴ This was the last time she appeared in public.

Besides her remarkable work with D.A.R., Julia was also very active in private philanthropy. The Matthew T. Scott Institute was established in Phelps, KY in 1906 in memory of her husband, to provide education for poor mountain whites using Julia’s own private funds.¹⁵ In 1908 Julia enlisted the interests of the D.A.R. in erecting a monument dedicated to George Rogers Clark and his companions for defending the territory of

⁹ “A Brilliant Function,” *The Daily Bulletin*, October 29, 1901

¹⁰ “Mrs. M. T. Scott For President of the Woman’s Club,” *The Daily Bulletin*, January 8, 1908

¹¹ “D.A.R. Elects Mrs. Scott by 12 Votes,” *The Philadelphia Telegraph*, April 28, 1909

¹² “Daughters of the American Revolution Have Built a Stately Memorial Hall,” *The Detroit News Tribune*, March 13, 1910

¹³ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, “Scott, Julia Green,” and “Mrs. Julia Green Scott Lingers at Death’s Door,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, April 29, 1923

¹⁴ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, “Scott, Julia Green.”

¹⁵ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, “Scott, Julia Green.”

Illinois. It was built on the banks of the Ohio River near the site of Old Fort Massac near Metropolis, Illinois.¹⁶

In 1911, as one of the largest landowners in IL with 10,000 acres of farmland and an advocate of conservation, Julia sent 40 of her tenant farmers to the University of Illinois College of Agriculture to acquaint them with new and advanced methods in farming. It was a huge success for the farmers as well as the university.¹⁷

Throughout her active years, Julia often arranged her time by spending the spring in Washington, D.C., the summer in Charlevoix, Michigan, the fall in Bloomington, and the winter in Mississippi. Her summer home in Charlevoix, which she called “The Wilds,” was a beautiful cottage in a private, wooded setting near the lake. In 1918 the city of Charlevoix tried to build a sidewalk along Julia’s street. Julia, fearing the loss of her privacy and the natural environment which she loved, told the city they could build the sidewalk “over my dead body.” When the construction crew came to build the sidewalk, they found Julia and her housekeeper-companion Mary Hunter sitting on their property line drinking lemonade—directly in the way. She won her battle that summer and the construction crew left defeated for the time being.¹⁸

Aside from her philanthropy, Julia was a shrewd business woman. In 1918, her income was \$118,000 which was a huge sum for anyone at that time. However in 1921 after managing the McLean County Coal Company since her husband’s death in 1891, she resigned as President and as a Director, turning over her stocks in the company to her son-in-law Carl Vrooman and grandson Scott Bromwell.

Just a few years later on April 29, 1923, Julia Green Scott died at her home on Taylor Street in Bloomington after suffering a paralyzing stroke. The lengthy obituary printed in the *Daily Pantagraph* quoted one of the U.S. Supreme Court justices as saying “I should call Mrs. Scott a great lady.¹⁹” To many people, her energy and drive were an inspiration. She was buried next to her husband at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.

By: Laurie Peterson, 2008

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¹⁶ “For Old Fort Massac, Daughters of the Revolution Would Preserve Historic Spot,” unknown newspaper, October 1908

¹⁷ “Mrs. Matthew T. Scott Educates Farmers, Sends 40 Tenants to Agricultural School,” unknown newspaper, February 20, 1911

¹⁸ Edith Gilbert. “Julia Scott, Where Are You? They’re Fooling with Your Place Again!” *Detroit Free Press*, February 13, 1971

¹⁹ “Mrs. M.T. Scott is Claimed by Death,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, April 30, 1923.