

Ada Walker Adams (Mrs. John Quincy Adams) (1842-1901)

Ada Elizabeth Walker was born June 6, 1842 in Perry City, New York. She was the daughter of Artemas Barnard Walker and Adeline Eliza Willey Walker. One of the founders of the National Society of Colonial Dames of America in the State of Minnesota, she joined the Colonial Dames by right of descent from Governor Thomas Dudley, though she also listed William Bradford as an ancestor.

Ada's father was proprietor of the Walker House Hotel, a hotel and resort on Silver Lake in Perry City. In July 1855, when Ada was thirteen years old, several boys and men in a fishing boat on Silver Lake reported seeing a large green monster arising from the water. Newspapers picked up the story and people traveled to the area in hopes of seeing it. Many stayed at the Walker House Hotel.



Figure 2: Walker House Hotel, home of Artemas & Adeline Walker and daughter Ada, which was destroyed by fire in 1857. From *History of the Town of Perry*



Figure 1: Ada Walker (Mrs. John Q.) Adams, Courtesy Faye Leach, Honorary Regent, Minnesota Daughters of the American Revolution



Figure 3: Artemas Walker, Ada's father, hotel proprietor who was the perpetrator of the Silver Lake Sea Serpent hoax.



Figure 4: Contemporary illustration of the Silver Lake Sea Serpent.

The Silver Lake Sea Serpent inspired paintings, postcards and an annual festival in Perry City - and increased business at the hotel. Two years later, the hotel was consumed by fire and amid the wreckage, firemen discovered a large coil of wire with scraps of green fabric, ropes and hoses.

Artemas Walker admitted that he and friends created the sea serpent and submerged it in the lake, using ropes and hoses to surface it when the fishermen approached.

After the fire, the family moved to Toronto, Canada, where Artemas was the proprietor of the American Hotel. By 1870, Artemas and Adeline returned to Perry, where he bought another hotel, and remained there. After Artemas' death in 1889, Adeline moved to Minnesota and lived with Ada and J. Q. Adams.

Ada married John Quincy Adams (1837-1920), a grain merchant, in Toronto on May 17, 1865. Ada and John Quincy had a son, John W. Adams, born in August 1866 in New York. They lived in St. Paul by 1875, and had adopted a daughter, Charlotte Bell Adams, by that time. By 1884, they moved to No. 3 Crocus Hill, to a house designed by notable architect Cass Gilbert. They lived there from 1884 until Ada's death in 1901. The house was subsequently razed.

Ada was involved in a wide range of St. Paul activities. Besides the NSCDA-MN and the D.A.R., she was involved with the Harvest Festival, Home for the Friendless, Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic, Mitford House, St. Luke's Hospital, Young Women's Friendly Association, and the New Century Club.



Figure 5: Ada's husband John Quincy Adams, a grain trader who was neither a U.S. President, nor one of two other men by the same name who lived in St. Paul at the same time. One was an African American newspaper publisher, and the other was a realtor. Courtesy MNHS

One of her favored charities, the Mitford House, was organized in 1884 by two other founders of the NSCDA Minnesota - Eliza Newport and Emily Gilman Noyes. Ada served on the board as Assistant Treasurer, and J.Q. Adams was listed as one of the early substantial donors. A home for working women that was clean, safe and charged moderate rates, its residents "passed the hours very pleasantly with music, games, books and sewing" according to the *St. Paul Daily Globe* in 1886.



Figure 6: Mitford House illustration in 1886 *St. Paul Daily Globe*

Ada wrote an account of a Colonial Dames program at the home of Christine Reeve, a fellow Dame, and her husband, General Charles McCormick Reeve, a Spanish American War hero, in June 1900:

In the pleasant days of June an invitation was received from Mrs. Reeve asking the maids and matrons of the Society of the Colonial Dames of Minnesota to take luncheon with her at her house upon the shore of Lake Harriet. The day specified being the twenty eighth of June, a large number of the members were out of the city, ... however, Mrs. Wade, Mrs. Edgerton, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Adams were fortunate enough to be able to avail themselves of the privilege of accepting Mrs. Reeve's hospitality.

Leaving Saint Paul about nine o'clock the party proceeded by the Como route, and at Minneapolis were joined by a goodly number of the Dames of our sister city. At the end of the line the ladies were met by General Reeve and his domestic aide-de-camp with two comfortable equipages and were driven through the shaded park drive of Lake Harriet to the beautiful home of the hostess. The location of this home is one of rare beauty, the house being situated upon an elevation overlooking the blue lake, encircled by a wide expanse of forest, meadow and upland....

The morning was delightfully spent in the great drawing room, a spacious apartment suggestive of many climes in its treasures gathered from Europe and the Orient. After a most refreshing luncheon ... a short business meeting was called. This meeting convened in the garden house, an Oriental tea house transplanted from the Chicago Exposition and forming a unique annex to the lawn accommodations....

The day will always be remembered as one of charming hospitality, the enjoyment of which was greatly deepened by an underlying sense of gratitude in that the host and hostess had been brought in safety through many perils and happily restored to the companionship of their loyal and beloved friends. - Ada W. Adams

Ada died on July 24, 1901. The Distaff Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution honored her memory in a special program in September 1901, featuring readings of essays and poems written in her honor. The chapter vowed to keep a flag-draped seat empty in her honor at all programs for a year after her passing. She was considered a founder of the St. Paul chapter and served as a Vice President - General of the national organization.

Less than three months after his wife's death, John Q. Adams' grain business failed. Both he and son John W. declared personal bankruptcy as well. Failure of the grain business was blamed on the actions of George Phillips, "the Chicago Corn King," to corner the corn market, resulting in losses by the J. Q. Adams and Co. estimated at up to \$1 million. In reporting the failure, the *Minneapolis Tribune* said J. Q. Adams "...is well and favorably known throughout the Northwest. No question has ever arisen as to his personal or commercial integrity." After the bankruptcy, son John W. went to work for the railroad, but John Q. remained in the grain business, listed as a grain dealer in city directories through 1907. He died in 1920 at the age of 83.

Colonial Ancestors:

William Bradford (1590-1657) was an English Puritan who traveled to America on the *Mayflower* and served as Governor of the Plymouth Colony at various times for almost thirty years. He is the ancestor of twenty three of our Minnesota Dames, including Ada Walker Adams.



Figure 7: *Embarkation of the Pilgrims*. oil on canvas by Robert Walter Weir, 1857, depicting English Puritans with William Bradford departing their temporary home in Holland. Brooklyn Museum, NY

Born in Yorkshire, England to a prosperous farming family, William was orphaned by the age of seven. Sent to live with two uncles, he suffered a lingering illness during which he read

extensively, becoming familiar with the Bible and classical literature. As an older youth, he attended sermons by the Reverend Richard Clyfton, where he met William Brewster of nearby Scrooby Manor. Several members of the congregation were arrested for practicing their religion. Fearing persecution, Bradford, Brewster and others decided to leave England and emigrate to the Dutch Republic where they could worship freely. In Leiden, Bradford lived with the Brewster family from 1607 until he turned 21 in 1611. A weaver, he set up his own household and married Englishwoman Dorothy May. They had a son, John, in 1617. By this time, a plan to emigrate to America was being discussed, and Bradford sold his home in Leiden in 1619. In 1620, he set off on the *Mayflower* and was one of approximately one hundred passengers who arrived at Cape Cod in November 1620. His wife Dorothy survived the voyage but died by falling overboard when the ship was anchored in the bay, and while Bradford was ashore on a scouting expedition in December 1620. He married the widow Alice Southworth in 1623, and all of his known descendants are from this second marriage.

Bradford was elected Governor of the colony in the spring of 1621, and served until 1632, serving again in 1635, 1637, 1639-43, and 1645-56. His journal, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, an account of the years 1621-1646, is one of the most complete and best-known descriptions of early life in the Plymouth Colony.

Thomas Dudley (1576-1653) is profiled in the Robert Bruce Langdon history sketch on this website. He is the ancestor of fifteen of our Minnesota Colonial Dames. Born in England, he served as governor of Massachusetts on four separate occasions. Dudley, a devout Puritan, was the founder of Newtowne, now Cambridge, Massachusetts. In addition to signing the charter for Harvard College, he served on its first board of overseers.

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