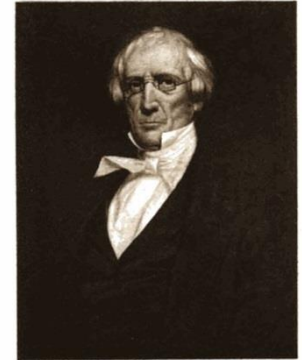


Freedom and Education: The Birdseye/Wheaton Family

Ellen Birdseye was born in Pompey, New York in 1816, the daughter of abolitionist Victory Birdseye, a descendant of Captain Beach Tomlinson (1726-1817) who served in the Revolutionary War. An earlier ancestor was William Wilcoxson (1601-1652), an early settler of Stratford, CT, through whom Ralph Waldo Emerson is also a descendant. Emerson is thus a 5th cousin of the Minnesota Birdseye/Wheaton family members.



Victory Birdseye

Victory, a lawyer, member of the New York state assembly and US congressman, authored the law that assisted New York residents who were kidnapped and sold into slavery. The law was used to gain the freedom of Solomon Northup, author of *Twelve Years a Slave*. Victory's great grandson Clarence Birdseye developed a new process for freezing vegetables and founded Birdseye Frozen Foods.

Ellen Birdseye was an educated woman; she was schooled at Cortland and Albany, and was the first person to have a piano in the village of Pompey. She married businessman Charles A. Wheaton (1809-1882) in 1834 and together they had twelve children. Throughout her life, she took advantage of learning opportunities available to her as a woman, such as lectures.



Ellen B. Wheaton

Ellen and Charles were abolitionists. They used their home as a safe house on the Underground Railroad between 1839 and 1847, helping escaped slaves make it safely to Canada. In 1839, Syracuse abolitionists helped Harriet Powell escape to Canada. Though the Wheatons were suspected of assisting, they were not arrested.

In her diary, Ellen commented on anti-slavery conventions in Syracuse, NY, Frederick Douglass' speeches, and the high profile rescues of Harriet Powell and William "Jerry" Henry. In October 1851, an escaped slave from Missouri named William "Jerry" Henry was arrested in Syracuse, New York. The anti-slavery Liberty Party was holding its convention in the city, and upon news of the arrest several hundred abolitionists broke into the jail and freed Jerry. He fled to Canada. In her diary (p 91) she wrote "Charles confidently expected to be arrested." The file used to free Jerry from his manacles was from the Wheaton house. Twenty six of his rescuers were tried - only one was convicted. Charles Wheaton was indicted but never arrested or tried.

Ellen died suddenly at the age of 42 in 1858.

Two years after Ellen's death, Charles moved to Northfield Minnesota, joining friends John and Anna Loomis North, who had founded the town. Charles purchased North's interests in several properties in town, including Northfield Flour Mill, which he later sold to Jesse Ames, whose mill perfected the process that led to the development of Malt-O-Meal.

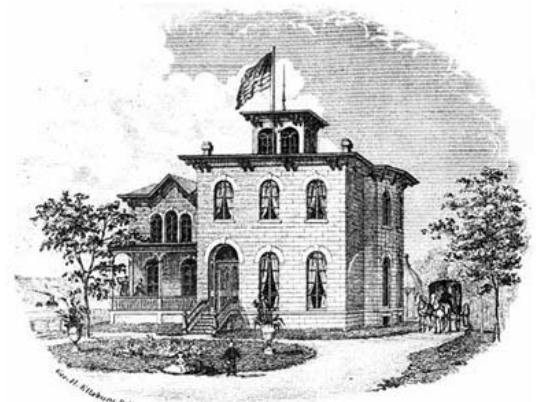


Once in Minnesota, he married widow Martha Wegener, and they had five children. In 1866, he donated land to what would become Carleton College. He served one term in the Minnesota state legislature and became editor of two newspapers, covering the attempted bank raid by the James Younger Gang in 1876. He criticized the St. Paul papers for their lack of coverage. When he died, the bank and other businesses in Northfield closed as a measure of respect.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "C. A. Wheaton".

Charles' son Dr. Charles A. Wheaton Jr. (1853-1916) settled in Minnesota as well. He married Ursula Stewart (1858-1943), daughter of his business partner, Dr. Jacob Stewart (1829-1884), a surgeon in the First Minnesota Infantry, U.S. Volunteers regiment in the Civil War and three-term St. Paul Mayor. Ursula donated three stained glass windows above the altar in the chapel at Fort Snelling to serve as a memorial to her father.

Charles Jr. became a physician and later a professor of surgery at the University of Minnesota Medical School. In several testimonials, he was noted by his colleagues and former students as a surgeon and teacher of unusual excellence. Doctors Wheaton and Stewart founded and ran City and County Hospital, today's Regions Hospital, in St. Paul. Ursula and Charles were the parents of Katharine Stewart Wheaton, who married Philip B. Winston, son of Minneapolis Mayor and Minnesota congressman Philip B. Winston, and Deborah Stevens, the daughter of Minnesota pioneer and state senator and congressman, John H. Stevens, and Helen Miller, together known as the mother and father of Minneapolis. Helen was a descendant of Sarah Towne Cloyce, an accused survivor of the Salem Witch Trials.



*City and County Hospital c. 1873
Courtesy St. Paul Police HS*

Minnesota Dames descendants of these ancestors are current and retired marketing and sales professionals. Today's family includes teachers, a physician, lawyer, psychologist, lobbyist, service, nutrition, and fitness professionals, developers, artists, and writers.

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