

The Godfrey Family: Sawmill Pioneers

Ard Godfrey Jr. was born on a cold January day in 1813, in Orono, Maine. His father was a millwright and Ard had followed in his father's footsteps. Ard married Harriet Newell Burr in 1838.

Ard came to Minnesota in 1847, at the invitation of Franklin Steele, to construct the first commercial dam and sawmill above St. Anthony Falls. Work began immediately upon his arrival and continued through the winter. The first logs were driven to the falls by the next fall, and the mill began operation. Three frame houses were constructed, including one for Mr. Godfrey. His family arrived at St. Anthony in April 1849. The family lived in the house until 1853.



Figure 1 Ard Godfrey Mill 1865 Courtesy MNHS

carefully along a similar route. Harriet had to pick her way along floating logs as she walked to take piano lessons. Her diary is used in educational programs about early settlers in Minnesota.



Figure 3 Twins Minnie and Mary Godfrey 1875 Courtesy MNHS

Ard and Harriet had seven children. Their third surviving child, Harriet, was the first white child born at St. Anthony Falls, just weeks after the family's arrival. Many years after the fact, Harriet wrote about the family's journey from Maine to Minnesota, by rail to Buffalo, NY, by ship to Milwaukee, then by stagecoach to Galena IL, steamboat to St. Paul and finally ox or horse cart to St. Anthony Falls. Several years later, an uncle in Boston procured a Chickering piano which was transported

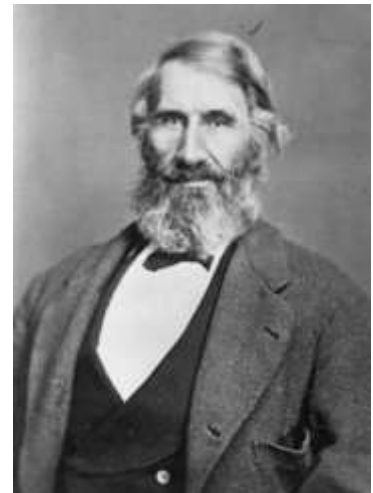


Figure 2 Ard Godfrey 1880 Courtesy of MNHS

Ard became the first postmaster at St. Anthony Falls in 1851, providing weekly mail service to St. Paul. Also in 1851, he held the first Masonic Lodge meeting at the falls in his parlor. His son Abner, sitting on the stairs, watched for intruders. The family home was also the gathering place for the Territorial Pioneers.

Ard and Harriet Godfrey's youngest child, Minnie, is the ancestor of current Minnesota Dame Barbara Peterson Burwell. Minnie and her twin sister Mary were born in November, 1857, shortly before the State of Minnesota was officially admitted to the Union.

The Civil War years were difficult. In 1862, the sawmill suspended operations because of the war. In order to meet the payments on the mortgage, Ard loaded provisions into a covered wagon and joined an expedition to Idaho looking for work. According to daughter Harriet's diary, he left his wife and seven children to bring in the crops. The Dakota War was unfolding in Minnesota just after his departure.

Ard died October 15, 1894 in Minneapolis, having lived a full and productive life.

His daughter Minnie married Daniel Ham. They had three children. The oldest, a son named Newell, died at age twelve. Their two daughters were Helen and Marguerite. Marguerite became the grandmother of Dame Barbara Burwell. She also survived difficult times. First, she contracted polio shortly before her wedding to Charles Palen. Second, when Charles died suddenly at age thirty three, leaving her with four young children ages two to ten years old.



Figure 4 Marguerite Ham Palen, age 6 in 1900, with older sister Helen



Figure 5 Children visit the Ard Godfrey House, 1925. Courtesy of MNHS

Her daughter Gretchen was born in 1923. She joined Shipstad & Johnson Ice Follies in 1942. She was a soloist and program cover girl for seven years. Later, she operated a dance studio. She married C. Donald Peterson, who became a Minnesota Supreme Court Justice. In the late 1960s, she was instrumental in organizing a restoration of the original Ard Godfrey house. It had been moved to Chute Square in 1909 where it served as a museum until 1943.



Figure 6 Gretchen Peterson with daughter Barbara

It gradually fell into disrepair. By the time the restoration project began, it was described as "a boarded up wreck." The project was headed up by the Women's Club of Minneapolis, of which Gretchen was a member. The renovation was completed and the house opened to the public in 1979. It remains the oldest wood frame house in Minneapolis.



Figure 7 Gretchen and Barbara

Barbara Peterson Burwell, descendant, continues their legacy of service through her philanthropy and leadership through the Burwell Family Foundation. A Colonial Dame, Barbara was Minneapolis Aquatennial Queen of the Lakes 1974, became Miss Minnesota 1975 and Miss USA 1976. She wrote a book about the experience, "Becoming a Beauty Queen," with her sister Polly, who was Miss Minnesota 1981. Upon completing her Miss USA reign, she attended the University of Minnesota and St. Olaf College. She graduated with a triple major in Speech Communication, American Studies and Political Science, pursuing a marketing and public relations career. Her Swedish heritage on her father's side was the foundation for earning the title Miss Svenskarnas Dag (a Scandinavian summer festival). She has served on the board of the American Swedish Institute.

She was named Swede of the Year by the American Swedish Institute for her efforts to preserve Swedish heritage. She was a recipient of the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 2016. She has served on numerous boards, including the Minnesota Orchestra as Vice President and Secretary and 1986 Symphony Ball Chair and as President of WAMSO, she has commissioned several Kinder Konzert music pieces. In addition, she has served on the boards of United Way, YMCA, Twin Cities Public Television, Children's Theater Company, Minnesota Historical Society, Abbott Northwestern Medical Foundation, Minneapolis Heart Institute, a National Trustee for Cystic Fibrosis and was a member of the Executive Committee for Superbowl XVI. She has served as a Regent at her alma mater, St. Olaf College, a Trustee for Breck School, and was inducted as a first member to the Edina High School Hall of Fame. She was named one of 25 Distinguished Women by the University of Minnesota. She also was named one of the University's College of Liberal Arts Alumni of Notable Achievement. She and her late husband Rod Burwell met at a bible study at Christ Presbyterian Church in Edina. They were married for 33 years, and are parents to three sons, Peter, Blake and Michael.

Colonial Ancestor

Richard Godfrey (1711-1792) of Taunton, Massachusetts served in Timothy Ruggles' Regiment in the French and Indian War in 1755. The regiment participated in the Battle of Lake George, one of the first British victories in the war, which led to the establishment of Fort William Henry (site of James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*.) Later, Richard was on the Taunton Committee of Safety 1775-76. The Committees of Safety were one of three types of town committees created and used by patriots to self-govern on the eve of the Revolutionary War, as Britain's formal government waned in power.

Resources

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