



Kappa Kappa Gamma FOUNDATION

THE STEWART HOUSE MUSEUM

NEWS FROM THE FOUNDER'S HOME



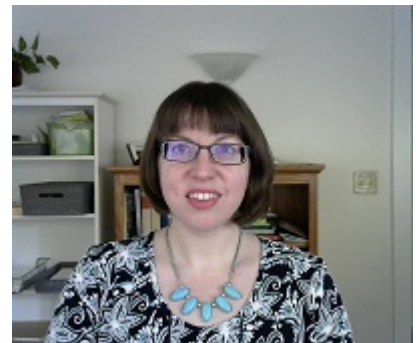
september 2020



From the Desk of Dr. Mary Osborne, *Monmouth*

Stewart House Museum Specialist

As I related in last month's newsletter, the Stewarts suffered the scandal of divorce. In an era in which society loved melodrama, divorce functioned as a real-life morality play. Newspapers portrayed the event as a struggle between heroes and villains, vice and virtue. Women often bore the brunt of the shame unless they could prove they were protecting their children. The act of mothering allowed them to assume the role of the victim. These conditions may explain why Minnie Stewart Nelson, *Monmouth*, maintained her good reputation after she and her first husband, William Wallace Nelson, divorced. Anecdotal evidence suggests that he abandoned her and their two young children. Nelson lived out the rest of his life in Rushville, Illinois, while Minnie returned to her parents' home and taught grade school until she remarried in 1889. It was difficult and costly to obtain a divorce, but in the mid-19th century, states expanded the criteria for the dissolution of marriage. Habitual drunkenness and inhumane treatment were among the reasons spouses could seek a divorce. Divorce increased after the Civil War and continued the rate to rise into the Progressive Era. According to Professor Leslie J. Harris, Illinois was among those states to add an omnibus clause to its laws, giving courts "vast discretion in granting divorces."



As society became more secularized, more people began to view marriage as a contract. Although women possessed the right to divorce their spouses, the law did not shield them from the negative consequences. Part of the issue was that divorce left the woman without an identity. She could not

revert to being a single woman under her father's protection, and she no longer had the security of her husband's name and position.

Minnie's sister-in-law — Ada Mariner Stewart, *St. Lawrence* — encountered this situation when she and W.K. Stewart divorced in September 1904. Unlike Minnie, Ada was childless. The reasons for their divorce remain unclear, but it may have hampered Ada's ability to resume her career as an elocution instructor. By this point, her father, Henry, was also ailing, and she may have decided to remain near him. A lawsuit involving his will likely prompted her to start anew out west. Ada relocated to Bliss, Idaho, where she reinvented herself as the proprietor of a hotel and secretary of the Bliss Townsite Company. That Ada identified herself as a widow, however, suggests that the townspeople may not have been as progressive as she was. For more about Ada, listen to episode five "A Stewart Family Letter" of my podcast "Voyage of Discovery."

THE LAW DOCKET IS COMPLETED

Cases for Sept. Term of Warren
County Circuit Court.

W. K. Stewart vs. Ada M. Stewart;
divorce.

R. E. White, administrator, vs.
Rebecca H. Boyd et al.; bill to con-
strue will and for trustee.

Eliphalet P. Munson vs. E. E.
Merridith et al.; bill to set aside
deed.

Orville L. Perry et al. vs. Cora
Perry et al.; partition and assign-
ment of dower.

C. C. Gawthorp vs. R. F. Robinson
et al.; bill to set aside deed.

Warren County Democrat, Sept. 15, 1904

dell.
Mrs. Ada Mariner of Avon, Illi-
nois was looking after her prop-
erty in Gooding for a few days
last week.

Idaho Evening Times, July 24, 1930

Miss Ada Mariner, who expects
soon to leave for Dakota, is selling
her household goods at private sale.

Macomb Journal, March 11, 1909

Ada always referred to herself as "Mrs. Mariner" after leaving Illinois.

From the Digital Archives

Happy Birthday, Lou Stevenson Miller, *Monmouth!* Lou was born on Sept. 23, 1854, in Peoria, Illinois.



Lou Stevenson as a college student
Kappa Kappa Gamma Digital Archives



Lou Stevenson Miller in 1936
Kappa Kappa Gamma Digital Archives

Landscape Project

See the latest progress on the landscape project! The irrigation system is nearly complete, and the Marjorie Moree Keith Memorial Patio is expanding.



Irrigation system installation | Photo credit: Mary Osborne



Irrigation system installation | Photo credit: Mary Osborne



Patio expansion | Photo credit: Mary Osborne

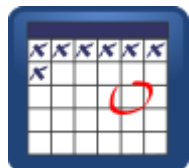
Coming Up: Front Porch Friday on Facebook Live!

On Sep. 25, at 6 p.m. CT, join me as I discuss how women broke a gender barrier by claiming bars as their own in the 1930s and beyond. Check out The Stewart House's Facebook page to find out what the featured drink will be.



Listen up

In this month's episode of "Voyage of Discovery," Kappa's Ritual and History Director Denise Rugani, *UC Davis*, and I talk about Kappa's historical markers in Monmouth.



Visit Stewart House

The Stewart House is open for tours! Physical distancing and disinfection practices are in place. Please contact the Museum Specialist to make reservations.