

## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

### JANE GREY SWISSHELM AND C. A. LOUNSBERRY

IN 1934 the Minnesota Historical Society published a book edited by Dr. Arthur J. Larsen and entitled *Crusader and Feminist*. The reference is to Jane Grey Swisshelm, the militant journalist of St. Cloud who was active there before and during part of the Civil War. Mrs. Swisshelm was not only an outstanding newspaperwoman, but a lecturer, an author, a crusader for what she believed to be right, and an army nurse. In the latter capacity an association and friendship developed between her and another outstanding pioneer character — Colonel C. A. Lounsberry.

The Minnesota Historical Society has an almost complete file from April 11, 1868, to Christmas, 1869, of the *Martin County Atlas* published at Fairmont. The editor and publisher of the paper was Colonel Lounsberry. It was Martin County's first newspaper. In one of the issues we learn from the pen of the colonel himself of his first meeting with Mrs. Swisshelm and of the interesting conditions surrounding the meeting.

At the age of eighteen, Lounsberry, an orphan, enlisted as a private for service in the Civil War with a Michigan regiment. On his twenty-second birthday he was commissioned colonel. He was wounded three times, twice seriously, and taken prisoner twice. At the close of the war in 1866 he went to Fairmont and engaged in the sheep business. In this venture he was wholly unsuccessful. In 1868 he founded and began publication of the *Martin County Atlas*, which he continued until Christmas, 1869.

The period of the publication of the *Atlas* covered the campaign year of 1868. The colonel was a successful candidate in that year for the office of county auditor of Martin

County. After its suspension in Fairmont, the *Atlas* was removed to Wells, where publication was continued through 1874. The colonel abandoned the paper in 1872 and secured editorial employment on the *Minneapolis Tribune*. Soon he removed to Bismarck, in Dakota Territory, where in 1873 he established the *Bismarck Tribune*. Its publication has continued to the present without interruption, and it flourishes today as one of the foremost newspapers of North Dakota. Lounsberry was engaged in other journalistic enterprises in that state, and he wrote a history of North Dakota.

While at Bismarck he became well acquainted with General George A. Custer, who was stationed at Fort Abraham Lincoln across the Missouri River. It was from that fort that Custer and his men went to battle and death on the banks of the Little Big Horn in June, 1876. Lounsberry intended to accompany the expedition, but refrained because his wife was ill. In reporting the terrible massacre to the *New York Herald*, for which he was local correspondent, the colonel accomplished one of the greatest newspaper scoops of all time. When the steamboat "Far West" wound its way down the Big Horn, Yellowstone, and Missouri rivers to Bismarck with the wounded of another battle and the first news that Custer and his entire command had been wiped out, Lounsberry rose to the occasion. For many hours, as those with information talked, he wrote, throwing the manuscript to a corps of telegraph operators who kept the wires hot to the *Herald* in New York. As a result the *Herald* had an advantage over all other papers. The telegraph bill was three thousand dollars. The *Herald* paid Lounsberry handsomely, the amount being, I believe, twenty-five hundred dollars. It also gave thirty-five hundred dollars to the widow of Mark Kellogg, who went with Custer in Lounsberry's place and lost his life in the fatal battle. It must be understood that in 1876 the railroad ended at Bismarck, and that

there were no telegraph, telephone, or other methods of communication west of the city.

On the first page of the issue of the *Atlas* for January 14, 1869, appears a reminiscent article by Lounsberry. In it he gives a vivid and interesting account of the Battle of the Wilderness in 1864, in which he participated and was wounded. The article appears under the following heading: "Personal Recollections. Mrs. Jane Swisshelm. By C. A. L." In the conclusion the writer gives an account of his first meeting with Mrs. Swisshelm, who attended him while serving as a nurse on a gunboat on the Rappahannock.

But let the colonel tell the story in his words, written seventy-two years ago:

One sultry afternoon about the last of May, we lay on board the hospital boat on the beautiful Rappahannock, expecting soon to start for Washington. During the excitement of the day our wound had been neglected and was decidedly painful. A bustling little woman, with a round, full face, and brown loose hair, dressed in a coarse delaine dress, and with stockingless feet, encased in men's brogans, with a towel fastened to her waist and bosom stuffed with lint and bandages, carrying a basin of water, came along and kindly offered her services and dressed our wound, keeping up all the time a steady stream of pleasant chat. She seemed to have a big heart, brim full of sympathy for the boys, and seemed particularly adapted to cheer them up by her conversation and aid them by her numerous acts of kindness. She dressed our wound several times during the voyage and, of course, we were anxious to know who our kind friend was and found that it was no other than Jane Swisshelm, the authoress. We afterwards met this lady in Washington with her family and became quite well acquainted with her.

Her face is far from lovely, and some of her expressions are more pointed than elegant, but God has given her a big and kind heart, and a disposition to use her power to the aid that mankind may be benefited. Noble Jane Swisshelm, long may she live, a blessing to her family and friends, one of her country's honored daughters.

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