

Isaphene Lawrence bio

Isaphene Catherine Lawrence, one of my great-grandmothers, was born October 5, 1805 at her parents' residence at 480 Broadway, in New York City. She was the fourth of seven children of Isaac and Cornelia Ann (Beach) Lawrence. She spent her girlhood in New York and at her parents' country estate in Newtown, Long Island (now part of Bayside, Queens). She had one brother and five sisters. Walter Barrett, in his 1868 book *The Old Merchants of New York* relates that the family went to St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, "on the corner of Broadway and Houston streets, in its palmy days, when Dr. Hawks preached there, and there never lived in this city such a family of beautiful daughters. They were the prettiest girls in the city" (pp. 66-67). Among mementos of the family I have an invitation to Miss Lawrence to attend a Yale College Ball in New York on September 11, 1822, and one from 1824 to attend the Lafayette Ball in Philadelphia, honoring General Lafayette. Isaphene Lawrence was married to Dr. Benjamin Moore McVickar on November 12, 1825, in the home of her parents, which was then at 498 Broadway. I know nothing about her life in New York, other than that she was active in charitable work with her mother.

After moving to Milwaukee in 1846, she was one of the women who organized the Milwaukee Orphan Asylum, and she was treasurer of this institution from 1850 until 1865. A resolution of the Board of the Orphan Asylum dated June 6, 1865 reads: 'Whereas the failing health of Mrs. I. McVickar, the beloved Treasurer of Milwaukee Orphan Asylum, has prompted her to resign the office so faithfully held for fifteen years, therefore resolved that the resignation of Mrs. I. McVickar be accepted with deep regret, and earnest wish that she may soon be restored to her sphere of influence in this institution of her adoption, and resolved that with one voice the Associated Managers would give full assurance to the retiring Treasurer, of their appreciation of her assiduous labors, and their entire confidence in the abiding feeling that the Board can ill afford to lose one whose fidelity and zeal have largely contributed to the prosperity and permanence of this institution. In behalf of the Managers, Mrs. D. Newhall, Corresponding Secretary, Milwaukee Orphan Asylum, June 6, 1865.'

A clipping from an old newspaper reads: 'During the anxious days that preceded the bombardment of Fort Sumter, when patriotic feeling ran high through Milwaukee, the display of flags and bunting in the city was so great that the small stock was soon exhausted, and those that did not buy early had to make their own or go without. It was during this flag famine that Mrs. McVickar, the wife of Dr. Benjamin McVickar, sat down in the old home on Van Buren Street and assisted by her three daughters made an American flag. On the day that the guns of Fort Sumter told the north that a war was raging, the doctor cut a sapling in his yard, and tacking the flag to it, raised it from the roof of his house. After every battle of the war, the flag waved from the roof of the old house, and after Appomattox sent its message of peace over the land, the old flag, now faded and tattered, was laid away in the garrett.'

Isaphene (Lawrence) McVickar was apparently in poor health the last three years of her life. She died September 18, 1868, and was buried in the McVickar family lot in Forest Home Cemetery in Milwaukee. A lovely portrait by Henry Inman of Isaphene (Lawrence) McVickar as a young girl is in the possession of [the Durand family]. An obituary said of her that 'she was nurtured in the highest, most polished and refined society of the city of New York. She brought hither [to Milwaukee] her engaging manners and her good breeding, and she has done her share in forming

those gentle and lady-like manners which have given such a charm to Milwaukee female society. She was a woman of excellent common sense, and was most active in promoting all the useful charities of the city, and it is not too much to say that she is one of the most devoted and most influential of those noble women who have done so much to build up the Protestant Orphan Asylum. Whether as a wife or a mother or a devoted member of the Episcopal church, to which she was ardently attached, she was most exemplary in the performance of her duties. Of later years, her ill health had confined her much to her home, and to that home the loss will be felt as one of those crushing blows which only God can assuage.'

Source: S.R. Durand