

## Illinois Women Artists, Part 35

# Candace McCormick Reed: reinventing herself

By Kristan H. McKinsey

Candace McCormick Reed (1818-1900) was a wife and mother who was lucky enough to marry a man who welcomed her into his professional world as a photographer. She truly had talent for the work and a head for business. Little did she know at first how fortunate that would be.



McCormick was born in Crab Orchard, Tennessee, approximately 60 miles west of Knoxville; her parents moved to Canton, Missouri, when she was one year old. In 1842 she married Ohio-born Warren A. Reed, five years her junior. In 1848, the young couple moved with their one-year-old son Ferdinand to Quincy, Illinois, the county seat of Adams County on the banks of the Mississippi River. Most of the town's earliest settlers brought progressive Yankee values from New England, and a wave of German immigrants were fleeing political unrest.

Reed opened the town's first photography business on the southeast corner of the downtown square, now Washington Park. Photography was a complicated and time-consuming process involving considerable knowledge of chemicals and metals. Early in their marriage, Candace began assisting her husband with the business, learning to handle the camera and to apply the chemicals that processed images. She became especially adept as a touch-up artist, carefully adding color enhancements.

The Reeds raised a family and took their place in the community. Candace gave birth to a second son, Warren Jr., in 1849. Three daughters born later did not survive past infancy. Warren served as superintendent of schools from 1852 to 1954. Their circle of friends included John Wood, founder of Quincy and future governor of Illinois. As the community grew from nearly 6,000 residents in 1848 to more than 20,000 in the late 1850s, so did Reed's business. He moved the studio to a larger location and kept up with the latest methods of photography and equipment. According to McEvoy and Beatty's 1857 *Official Business Directory*, WA Reed and Company "produced ambrotypes and melainotypes [tintypes] on short notice" while still offering daguerreotypes. The couple purchased a large home at 709 Broadway Street.

Their comfortable life together ended when Warren died of "consumption" (tuberculosis) in April 1858. His obituary in *The Daily Whig Republican* described him as a "highly esteemed citizen" with "many excellencies of character which endeared him to all who know him." Candace was left to support two young sons as well as her mother-in-law Phoebe (1790-1863). Luckily, she knew the business after a decade assisting her husband. And he had signed a contract in 1857 to make a photographic record of the construction of an octagonal house for then Lieutenant Governor John Wood, a commission that would take five years.

To cover immediate expenses, Reed sold her husband's business. She advertised in the October 18th *Quincy Daily*



*Mr. and Mrs. Lawton Kline*

*Whig and Republican* that she had sold the "Model City Gallery" but would produce even better photographs in her Excelsior Picture Gallery opening soon at 103 Hampshire Street. Her younger sister Celina J. McCormick would continue to assist her with every "style of picture in the Photographic art," including crystalotypes (salt prints made from glass negatives). Reed promised affordable rates. The advertisement concluded with a "respectful appeal" for patronage from "a generous public" so that she can support and educate her family. Interestingly, she added that "Mrs. R. will also do plain sewing and stitching."

Reed photographed buildings of note in town, making a series of stereoscopic views available for purchase. Advertisements indicate that she continued to make daguerreotypes as well as newer types of photographs. By 1860 she was able to open a branch studio in Canton, Missouri, where her brother Wales McCormick worked as a photographer and another one in LaGrange, Missouri. As war threatened in 1860 and despite her financial success, Reed moved her Quincy studio into a more affordable space at 81 Hampshire



**Stereoscopic card, Octagon House for John Wood, Quincy**

Street, continuing to ask the public to “patronize the widow” in her advertisements.

Soon after the Civil War started, Reed established the Sisters of the Good Samaritan to help soldiers and their families on the front and at home. Wanting to do even more, she volunteered as a nurse at Union Army hospitals in Nashville, Chattanooga, and Vicksburg, leaving her brother and sister to run her studio for a year. Reed wrote letters and comforted the soldiers. She was said to be among the first Northern women to enter battlefields to provide immediate triage. She interceded with doctors for those facing amputation, arguing for restraint. She spent her own money for necessities, and personally delivered supplies to soldiers from Quincy, gaining their lifelong respect and affection.

Several dozen examples of Reed’s photographs survive, identified by the impressed name on the cards on which photographs are mounted. From 1871 to 1874, her backmark included the logo of the National Photographic

Association (1868-1880), a professional organization established “for the purpose of elevating and advancing the art of photography, and for the protection and furthering the interests of those who make their living by it.” Both Reed and her late husband had promoted themselves as “artists” rather than “photographers.” Their profession required both skill and an artistic sensibility. Patrons



**Backmarks on reverse of photograph by Candace Reed**

could select from a number of backdrops, draperies, pedestals, large urns and vases as settings for their portraits; various settees and chairs were available for comfort, and floral bouquets added sophistication. Reed was known for her talent for adding definition and color by retouching photographs in crayon, oil, watercolor, and India ink.

Back in Quincy, Reed worked with glass negatives which allowed her to print multiples of each image. She moved to a third-floor studio with expansive skylights at 403½ Hampshire Street. A fire destroyed everything in late 1878, but she rebuilt within a year and continued working until 1888. In early 1900 she died ten days after suffering a stroke. Reed’s obituary described her as a “broadminded ... and unselfish” woman, “one of the most revered residents of the city.” She had been able to meet a series of adversities and find success. 

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