

Sarah Farnum Sargent Jackman

It's never too late to learn to paint

By Candace Summers

Sarah Farnum Sargent Jackman came to art late in life and never made a career of it, but her creations brought joy to the friends and family members who received them as gifts.



Jackman was born on December 18, 1816, in Boscawen, New Hampshire, the oldest of five children born to Isaac and Rebecca Merrill (Farnum) Sargent. The family was among the earliest settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the New Hampshire land grants. Jackman's father died in a barn raising accident when she was nine years old, leaving her mother to raise five children and run the family farm by herself.

Jackman attended school in Boscawen, then studied at nearby Salisbury Academy to become a teacher. She taught in Boscawen and Warner, New Hampshire, until around 1840 when she moved to Lowell, Massachusetts, for further study, working as an assistant teacher to support herself. Jackman's salary was \$12/month (about \$350 in 2021 money).

The many letters Jackman wrote in the early years of her life prove her eloquence as a writer. She was quoted to have said that she considered letter writing an art, and during her lifetime it was known that "her gift of expression by word and pen was choice and concise." She contributed to the *Offering*, the first magazine published by women in the United States, based in Lowell between 1841 and 1849. After completing her schoolwork in Lowell, Jackman

accepted a new teaching position in Quincy, Massachusetts. At that time, she contributed poems frequently to various newspapers in the Boston area, especially the *Olive Branch*.

On November 22, 1843, Jackman married her childhood sweetheart, John A. Jackman (1816-1896), also a Boscawen native, in West Newton, Massachusetts. Jackman gave up her ambitions of being a writer and devoted her life to her husband and raising their family: John Jr., Frank, Fred, Caroline, and Georgia, plus two children that died in infancy.

John Jackman began working as a station agent for the Boston & Worcester Railroad in 1837. In 1852 he moved his young family to Norwalk, Ohio, when he was appointed superintendent of machinery and worked to help complete the Toledo and Cleveland Railroad. Seven years later he returned to his original employer as superintendent of machinery; during the Civil War he oversaw the transportation of troops and supplies by rail. In May 1864, the family moved to Bloomington, Illinois, after John was hired as superintendent of machinery for the Chicago and Alton Railroad. He had "general charge of all the machine shops, and furnish[ed] the designs by which all locomotives, boilers, and articles of use in the shops are made."

Jackman and her husband were each active in the community life of Bloomington, joining "any good cause whatever that shall enhance the prosperity of this good city, and accord honor to its generous people." John served on various committees, boards, and community organizations including the Bloomington Board of Trade, Board of Education, Science Association, Library Association, and American Bible Society. Jackman was also very active in public philanthropy, widely admired for her compassion and charity towards those less fortunate than herself. Many who knew her said that she never turned anyone away who came to her door. She was among the promoters and charter members of the Bloomington Benevolent Association which organized soon after the end of the Civil War, serving as treasurer for a short time.



Sarah Farnum Sargent Jackman, date unknown



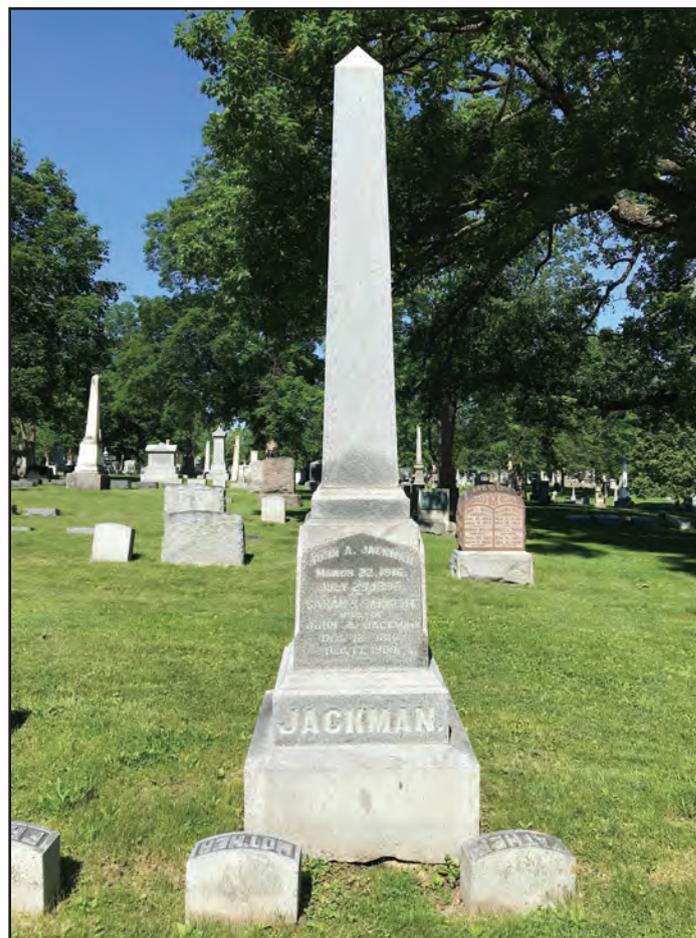
The Jackmans purchased this house at 507 W. Locust Street in Bloomington from attorney William Holmes in 1873, and lived the rest of their lives there; descendants continued to occupy the house until 1963.

Particularly interested in books and literature, Jackman helped reorganize the Bloomington Library Association. In 1867, as a result of her contributions and efforts, she was named to its Board of Directors. She served as Vice President of the association from 1870 to 1878, spending her own time and money to supply the library with whatever it needed. Jackman was a charter member of the Women's Educational Association at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington. She was also instrumental in getting a place set aside in the Bloomington City Cemetery in "Memory of our unknown dead" (also known as The Unknown Soldier Monument) during the city's 2nd Decoration Day.

After her children were grown, Jackman took an interest in developing her artistic talents. She enrolled in oil painting classes with Mrs. Horace F. Smith for the pure pleasure of it around 1870. Jackman began with landscapes and portraiture; as her artistic abilities grew, Jackman took additional lessons from noted portrait painter Albert Jenks of Chicago. Over the course of several months under his tutelage, she painted two portraits of her grandchildren and several other studies. Tragically, these works were lost in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 which destroyed the studio where she worked in the home of her daughter, Caroline Kimball.

Jackman also studied under other regional artists such as P. Fishe Reed of Indianapolis, Henry Elkins of Chicago, and Albert W. Kenney of Bloomington. However, the art form in which Jackman particularly excelled and was most prolific was china painting. The designs for one set of plates she painted were copied from flowers grown in her own garden. Sadly, no known examples of her art works are known to survive, despite being gifts to members of her family.

Jackman's interest in art extended beyond what she created. She was one of the original incorporators of the Bloomington Art Association on March 12, 1888. At a meeting of the Bloomington Sketch Club two weeks earlier at Withers Public Library, she was one of several community members appointed to initiate the organization of an art association. Formed with the object to "encourage and promote the study, cultivation, and practice of the fine arts in the city of Bloomington, Ill," the society lasted four years when the treasury was in debt. The Bloomington Art Association was revived again in 1922 and continues to today as the McLean County Arts Center.



Jackman Monument at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery, photo circa 2021.

Jackman remained active up until the time of her death on December 17, 1900. Just six weeks earlier, she painted a picture for her granddaughter, illustrating that "her hand had not lost its cunning even in old age." After an illness of several weeks, Jackman finally succumbed to an acute infection of the throat and lungs. She is buried at the Jackman family plot next to her husband at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.

Candace Summers is Director of Community Education at the McLean County Museum of History in Bloomington.

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