

Luella Kimball (1854 – 1891)

Not much is known about Luella Kimball, sometimes known as Luella Rankin. Luella was the fourth child of Holt Kimball and Harriet Rankin, following sister Ellen J. Kimball, brother Joseph Kimball, and sister Emma Rankin Kimball. She, as well as the rest of her siblings, was most likely born around 1854 in New Hampshire.

Before Luella moved to Bloomington, Illinois her mother Harriet died in 1858 or 1859 leaving the children to be raised by her sister Melinda Rankin. Melinda despised Holt Kimball for unknown reasons and Luella and her sister Emma may have been raised believing their father was dead. In her letters, Melinda had this to say about Holt: "I hope he will finish up his miserable existence after a while. He never need trouble himself about his children, they would not go near him. They hold him in perfect abhorrence." Melinda was the first Protestant missionary in Mexico and continued the profession for the rest of her life. In excerpts from her letters she wrote that she "tried to feel for them as their mother would, if she had lived. They are smart and interesting children, especially the girls."¹ At some point the Rankin family lived in Haverhill, Scioto County, Ohio, where Luella might have been raised with a relative. The Kimballs and Rankins, as well as the Ela and Rowell families (whom they had known in New Hampshire), emigrated to Bloomington together. It is also believed that the Rankins and Rowells were related.

Luella was a schoolteacher for some years and taught both in Danvers Township and Bloomington. She boarded at the home of George P. Ela in the 1880s at 309 East Locust Street. Sadly, Luella succumbed to mental illness and was eventually taken to court by her aunt Melinda and her sister Ellen to be proved insane. Their first two attempts at charges were dismissed but they succeeded on their third attempt after March 3, 1889 when Luella threw carbolic acid on a lady, a girl, and a gentleman at church just as Sunday School was commencing. Luella was placed in jail after the lady's husband swore out a warrant. The *Daily Pantagraph* said, "Her act yesterday is the result only of aberration of the brain, as she had no spite against those whom she chose as victims."² Luella was committed to Eastern Illinois State Hospital for the Insane, which later became Kankakee State Hospital. She apparently fought the charges brought on by her aunt and sister by bringing witnesses in her defense.

Luella's sisters, Ellen and Emma, were known for their unusually strong attachment for each other. The sisters lived together almost all of their lives, attended Western seminary school at Oxford, Ohio together, and were both members of Second Presbyterian Church. The two died within a day of each other with Emma passing away on November 25, 1918, and Ellen following the next day. They became ill for several weeks during a visit to Decatur to see Emma's son, Carl R. Dick. The *Daily Pantagraph* commented on the closeness between the two sisters, stating: "The death of the sisters marks the culmination of a most lasting love and respect for each other and of two lives fraught with good deeds and with Christian virtues."

Luella died of unknown causes in April 1891. It is not known whether she died at the state hospital or not but she was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery on April 11th in her family's burial plot.

By: Sarah Yoo, 2008

¹ Luella Kimball Evergreen Cemetery Walk file, McLean County Museum of History Archives

² "Unlooked for Occurrence," *The Daily Pantagraph*, March 4, 1889.