

## **The Pre-Plank Intellectuals of Sheboygan Falls**

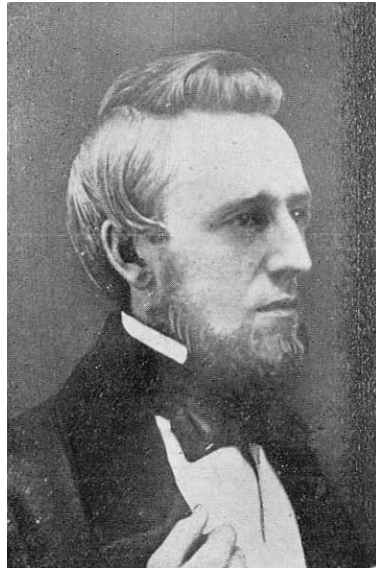
**by Scott Noegel**

When one thinks of Sheboygan Falls in the early 1840s, one naturally conjures black and white images of pioneer log cabins, the town's primitive mill, and settlers trading with Native American tribes. One pictures a time when work commanded nearly every daylight hour and many of the nights. One imagines the many hardships that followed the tiny trails that connected the village to the rest of the world. Of course, such images are quite accurate. These were very rugged times, lived in the most primitive of conditions, and far from the conveniences we now take for granted. Nevertheless, few would imagine that Sheboygan Falls was then home to a vibrant intellectual community.

Prominent among the young intellectuals was Horace Rublee and his sister Emeline, both of whom also are numbered among the town's first schoolteachers. Horace and Emeline came from Vermont in 1840 with their mother Martha. Their father Alva had arrived in 1839, and he managed William Farnsworth's sawmill. As both Horace and Emeline would later relate,<sup>1</sup> the wilderness town at that time was primarily a community of young people, mostly from New England, with a strong intellectual interests.

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<sup>1</sup> Emeline wrote a paper about her early experiences that her brother Horace read before the Pioneer Society at Sheboygan Falls on February 22, 1894. It was published again as "Mr. Rublee's Reminiscences," *Sheboygan County Historical Review* 2/1 (1910), pp. 5-7. The photographs here of Horace and Emeline are found therein. The same issue contains reminiscences of Emeline Rublee as related to a friend, Mrs. Otto Gaffron. Both of the reminiscences were read before the G. G. G.'s, a women's club at Plymouth on October 26, 1909. The intellectual nature of Sheboygan Falls continued to fascinate its residents for many years, as seen by the numerous times the reminiscences were republished. See, e.g., the *Sheboygan Press*, February 14, 1914, April 17, 1916, and Horace Rublee's "Reminiscences of Sheboygan Falls," written in 1857, which appeared again in the *Sheboygan Press*, April 23, 1926. In turn, these were republished with some variations in the *Sheboygan Press*, April 29, 1927, August 25, 1934, and March 16, 1939.



*Horace and Emeline Rublee, ca. 1855*

Indeed, during the winters, the settlers held a weekly debating society, which opened with someone reciting an original essay or poem. Though books at first were hard to come by, the settlers strove to have more sent and they shared them openly with each other. Early titles read and discussed in literary meetings included Scott's *Lady on the Lake*, Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, Goethe's *Faust*, in addition to works by Byron, Milton, and Shakespeare. One of the most influential books consumed by the village was Combe's *On the Constitution of Man*, which combined evolutionary ideas with moral philosophy and neuroanatomy. Today these ideas are associated with phrenology.

This was a very progressive town. Nearly everyone read the New York *Tribune*, then edited by Horace Greeley. Greeley, and others whose works they read, inspired a strong interest in creating a utopian society based on the social movement known as "Fourierism." Fourierism was a socialist philosophy of reform based on the ideas of the French theorist Charles Fourier that aimed to transform society into self-sufficient and

independent communities. The philosophy inspired the famous Brook Farm experiment of West Roxbury, Massachusetts, a communal society founded by Unitarian minister, George Ripley. Also informing the Brook Farm was the principle of transcendentalism, a religious and cultural philosophy that aimed to reward equal shares for equal distribution of chores, thus providing additional time to all for intellectual and scientific endeavors.<sup>2</sup> Many in Sheboygan Falls adopted these principles and attempted to apply them to their new society. As Emeline Rublee noted, the movement “broke out with a good deal of virulence right here in those primitive days.”<sup>3</sup>

The experiment was short lived. Not only did the Brook Farm fail as a social experiment, Sheboygan Falls underwent a tremendous amount of change, especially when the first major wave of European settlers came. Before their arrival, Sheboygan Falls was much more populated than Sheboygan, which was merely a stopping point for logging ships taking their timbers south. As Emeline put it, Sheboygan, or “The Mouth” as they called it then, was considered “the duller and more conservative region (of Sheboygan County)... Little intellectual stimulus was found there...”<sup>4</sup> All this changed with the European newcomers.

Horace Rublee left Sheboygan Falls for Madison shortly after 1850 and he quickly became the co-editor and owner of the town’s political paper, *The Argus*. Eventually he would become the State Librarian of Wisconsin, editor of the *Madison State Journal*, Minister to Switzerland under the Grant administration, editor of the *Boston Advertiser*, and the editor and owner of the Milwaukee *Sentinel* until his death in

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<sup>2</sup> Among the founders of the Brook Farm was novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne.

<sup>3</sup> “Mr. Rublee’s Reminiscences,” p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> “Mr. Rublee’s Reminiscences,” p. 6.

1896. His two sons would become major players in national and international politics.

Emeline Rublee married George T. Cole, another prominent early settler. Her children too became important figures in law and education.<sup>5</sup>

The early reminiscences of Horace and Emeline Rublee help us to see the lives of Sheboygan Falls' first settlers in greater depth and color. They remind us that among the farmers and fellers of trees were intellectuals, eager to participate in the great social experiment of early Wisconsin, and surprisingly self-aware of their roles in making history.

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<sup>5</sup> I intend to write in greater depth about the Rublee family and their descendants for an upcoming edition of *The Researcher*, as the family is not represented in Janice Hildebrand, *They Were First* (Sheboygan Falls, WI.: SCHRC, 2003).

## Log School Leaders: The Rublee Family of Sheboygan Falls by Scott Noegel

In a previous edition of *The Researcher*, I touched upon the intellectual community of Sheboygan Falls during the early 1840s, with special attention to the progressive siblings Horace and Emeline Rublee, each of whom taught in Sheboygan County's first schoolhouse.<sup>1</sup>



In this issue, I follow the later lives of Horace and Emeline and trace the influence that they had upon their descendants. My aim is to show that their love for literature, politics, education, and independent thinking had a profound impact that reached well beyond Sheboygan Falls.

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<sup>1</sup> Horace and Emeline came with their mother Martha (nee: Kent) and sister Catherine (b. August 6, 1838, d. September 11, 1856) to Sheboygan Falls from Berkshire, Vermont in 1840, a year after their father, Alva, had arrived. Another sibling Jane Lucy Rublee (b. August 20, 1842, d. August 17, 1898) was born in Wisconsin two years before their father Alva died (May 13, 1844). She married James Van der Made (b. October 1, 1836, d. December 28, 1900), and they moved to Minnesota. After Alva's death, Martha Rublee married Adonikam Farrow, her husband's business partner and settler from Maine (b. 1801, d. June 2, 1865). The Rublee and Kent families have a long and distinguished intellectual pedigree in New England. Their ancestors include town representatives, theologians, legislators, and judges. The photograph of the Sheboygan Falls schoolhouse appeared in Carl Zillier, *History of Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, Past and Present*. Vol. 1 (Chicago: S. J. Clark, 1912), pp. 134-135.

After leaving Sheboygan Falls in 1849, Horace Rublee enrolled at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, which had been founded the previous year. A year later he returned to Sheboygan Falls, where he resumed his post as schoolteacher for two years. Afterwards, he headed back to Madison where he resumed his studies and supported himself by working as a legislative reporter for the Madison *Argus* and *Democrat*. In 1853, he quit school to devote his energy entirely to the *Wisconsin State Journal*, and soon he assumed co-ownership of the paper. It was at this time that Horace was able to combine his gift for journalism with his interest in politics. With the disintegration of the Whig party, Rublee met with other Whig members at Ripon, where on March 20, 1854, they founded the State Republican Party. Their platform aimed to promote the abolition movement and advance civic virtues and honorable conduct in politics.

In 1857, Horace married Catherine Hopkins, a native of New York (b. January 1, 1833, d. April 21, 1921). They would have three children: Katherine Rublee (b. October 8, 1858, d. July 14, 1876), William Alvah Rublee (b. March 16, 1861, d. April 15, 1910), and George C. Rublee (b. July 7, 1868, d. April 26, 1957).

It was while raising his young children that Horace served as the Wisconsin State Librarian (1856-1858) and Curator of the Wisconsin Historical Society (1857-1871). He also became the Republican Party Chair from 1859-1869, and in 1868, while running as a candidate for the U.S. Senate, he served as delegate to the Republican National Convention. In 1869, President Ulysses S. Grant appointed Rublee as Minister to

Switzerland, a post that he held with great success until 1876.<sup>2</sup> Sadly, while living abroad, Horace and Catherine suffered the loss of their daughter Katherine, who died of diphtheria while in Dresden, Germany.



*Painting of Horace Rublee by Ralph Clarkson*

After returning to the United States, Horace served an additional three years as Chair of the Republican Party. In 1878, he went east to assume the editorship of the *Boston Advertiser*, but he returned a year later, at which time he purchased, and became the editor of, the Milwaukee *Sentinel*. He kept this position, not always without controversy,<sup>3</sup> and lived among Milwaukee's fashionable elite until his death on October 19, 1896.

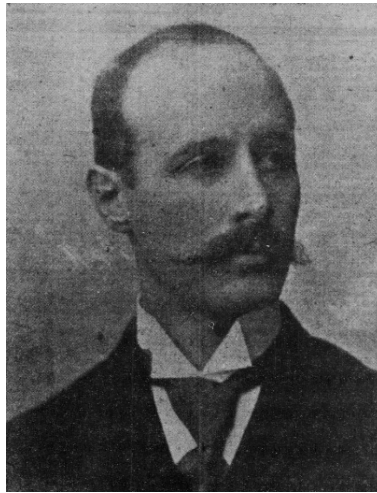
His two surviving sons lived equally influential lives. William Rublee was sent east to attend Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. Afterwards, he attended Harvard

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<sup>2</sup> Rublee was instrumental in getting the United Kingdom to settle on the *Alabama* claims and in establishing an international gold standard. The Minister position forced him to sell his portion of the *Wisconsin State Journal*.

<sup>3</sup> Many German Catholics and Lutherans attacked Rublee's *Sentinel* for its support of the controversial Bennett Law and what they felt to be its secular view on matters of religion. According to his wishes, he was cremated and his ashes were interred beside his daughter at Forest Home Cemetery in Milwaukee. His home in Milwaukee still stands at 1223 North Prospect Avenue.

University and he graduated in 1883 with a degree in French and German. He then entered Harvard Law School, finishing in 1885. William then returned to Milwaukee and worked as a political editor for the Milwaukee *Sentinel*, soon becoming its Vice President and Director.



*William A. Rublee*<sup>4</sup>

On June 6, 1890, President Benjamin Harrison appointed Rublee as Consul General of the United States to Prague (then in Bohemia). He retired on November 9, 1893.

On October 7, 1896, William married Katherine Smith Rogers (b. October 4, 1878, d. May 19, 1959) in Milwaukee. The couple had three children: Horace Rublee (b. September 11, 1898, d. September 12, 1985), Alva Frances Rublee (b. February 11, 1905, d. July 12, 1910), and Laura Christine Rublee (b. May 13, 1908, d. May 6, 1986). It is during this period that President McKinley and later Theodore Roosevelt appointed him

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<sup>4</sup> The photograph appeared in the *Minneapolis Journal*, March 8, 1901.



as Consul General at Hong Kong (March 2, 1901), Havana, Cuba (September 15, 1902),<sup>5</sup> Vienna, Austria (March 26, 1903), and then again at Hong Kong (May 17, 1909). Sadly, William Rublee died while in Hong Kong at the young age of forty-nine.<sup>6</sup>

William's brother, George Rublee, was an equally ambitious intellectual and he followed in his father's progressive footsteps. He too attended Phillips Exeter Academy and he was the first and only graduate of the Groton School in 1886. He then took his BA at Harvard University, and his LLB at the Harvard Law School. Upon graduation, George taught law at Harvard until 1895, when he began practicing law in New York. However, in 1894 he moved to Milwaukee to assist his ailing father. After his father died, he again practiced law in Chicago, where, on January 12, 1899, he met and married Juliet Barrett, a wealthy free thinking socialite who had attended Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut, and who had become very active in the modern dance and early feminist movements.

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<sup>5</sup> He replaced Edward S. Bragg, four-time Congressman and former Wisconsin Governor, perhaps most famous for commanding the Iron-Brigade during the Civil War. Rublee's salary for the Havana post was about \$7000 per year, roughly \$183,000 today.

<sup>6</sup> He died on April 15, 1910 of peritonitis. His wife remarried to Elias Fassett Dunlevy (b. September 12, 1861, d. May 10, 1939). They moved to California where they had a daughter, Deirdre Dunlevy (b. June 27, 1912, d. March 28, 2005). The family then moved to Denver, Colorado.



*Juliet Barrett Rublee*

The following year, Victor Morawetz invited George to New York to practice law in his firm, which then counted J. P. Morgan as its chief client. Morgan was in the process of creating U.S. Steel. By 1901, shrewd investments allowed George and Juliet to retire in their early thirties. They moved to Europe where they enveloped themselves in European elite society; George even became the King of Sweden's favorite tennis partner. When they left Europe in 1904, George returned to practice law with Morawetz. A few years later, the couple purchased a home in Cornish, New Hampshire, which at that time was associated with the Cornish Art Colony, and considered the "American Athens," an artistic and literary mecca.

Under the William Taft administration, George Rublee worked with Louis Brandeis (namesake of Brandeis University), but his allegiance to the new Progressive Party severed his relation to Brandeis, a Democrat, and so in 1912, George became a speechwriter for President Roosevelt. Two year later he became an important lobbyist for anti-trust legislation. He persuaded Woodrow Wilson to support a portion of the Federal

Trade Act that empowered the commission to prosecute unfair methods of competition. Wilson nominated George Rublee as one of the first five Commissioners, but the Congress blocked the appointment for political reasons.<sup>7</sup> Not long afterwards, Wilson made Rublee a member of the Federal Trade Commission.<sup>8</sup>



*George Rublee in 1914, courtesy of the Library of Congress*

George's wife Juliet was equally progressive. On May 19, 1914, she served as the Grand Marshal for the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage's march on Washington.

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<sup>7</sup> George Rublee had acted as a campaign manager against the Republican Senator Jacob Gallinger of New Hampshire, who took personal offense to his appointment.

<sup>8</sup> For his own account, see George Rublee, "The Original Plan and Early History of the Federal Trade Commission," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York* 11/1 (1926), pp. 114-120.



*Juliet Rublee as Grand Marshal, courtesy of the Library of Congress*

In 1915, Juliet was an American delegate at the Peace Congress held at The Hague. Germany considered her such a political threat that they barred her from entering Germany and Belgium. She also was a close personal friend of Margaret Sanger,<sup>9</sup> who later regarded Juliet as responsible more than any other person for the success of the birth control movement. When World War I broke out, she picketed outside the White House in support of U.S. neutrality. Yet, her interests went well beyond politics. In 1925, she funded and led an expedition for sunken treasure in the Mediterranean Sea, and in 1932, she funded and produced the first U.S. feature film made entirely in Mexico, *Flame of Mexico*.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The photograph of Juliet above is addressed to Margaret Sanger, courtesy of the Margaret Sanger Papers. Juliet also aided the birth control movement with her personal fortune.

<sup>10</sup> It took three years to complete the film, and though it was the height of the Great Depression, she spent \$150,000 to make it, nearly \$5,000,000 by today's standards. The film is set during the Mexican Revolution, but it addresses contemporary U.S.-Mexico policy with regard to oil laws. Unlike most American films at the time, she cast the American character, an oil investor name Thornton, as the villain. See Isabel Arrendondo,

In 1938, George became the Director of the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees Coming from Germany, a post that demanded a great deal of sensitivity, especially in the light of his Wisconsin roots. He tried to negotiate with the Nazi government to allow Jews to emigrate along with some of their property, but the negotiations failed, and so Rublee resigned his post. The next year he sponsored a bill that would allow for the admission of 20,000 Jewish refugee children to the United States, but Congress rejected the bill. His intellectual proclivities interested the newspapers who said of him: "When he is not absorbed in some ticklish international problem around the clock he plays golf or reads the Greek dramatists for relaxation."<sup>11</sup>

George Rublee's political and personal life was far more involved than I can describe here. Yet, even this cursory treatment illustrates his contributions to social, political, and economic life. George Rublee credited his father Horace for his progressive outlook and his interest in education and politics.<sup>12</sup>

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From Travelogues to Political Intervention in Juliet Barrett Rublee's *Flame of Mexico*," *Mexican Studies* 26 (2010), pp. 79-93.

<sup>11</sup> *Dunkirk* (New York) *Evening Observer*, December 28, 1938.

<sup>12</sup> See Marc Eric McClure, *Earnest Endeavors: The Life and Public Work of George Rublee* (Greenwood Publishing Group: Westport CT., 2003), pp. 6-7.



*Emeline Rublee, ca. 1855*

Horace's sister Emeline Julia Rublee (b. February 16, 1836, d. June 26, 1920) married George T. Cole (b. October 3, 1832, d. September 22, 1903), the son of Charles D. Cole, who was once described as "liberal in his views regarding religion... never associated with any church. A man of broad views... unquestionably its (Sheboygan County's) most prominent and influential citizen."<sup>13</sup> He also attended Beloit College and served as a Democrat representative at State conventions.<sup>14</sup>

Emeline was an intellectual well engaged with civic affairs. An early paper remembered her as follows:

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<sup>13</sup> *Portrait and Biographical Record of Sheboygan County, Wisconsin* (Chicago: Excelsior Publishing Company, 1894), p. 696. Cole also was the county's first Post Master and Register of Deeds.

<sup>14</sup> He did not finish his studies at Beloit College. See *Wisconsin Weekly Advocate*, September 24, 1903.

In her earlier days, before marriage, she taught school, and throughout her life was a great reader, always keeping in touch with matters of public interest, both local and national, and only the day before her death made anxious inquiry regarding the Democratic National convention at San Francisco.<sup>15</sup>

Though social realities did not allow Emeline to become a player on the national stage, like Horace, she enjoyed a strong intellectual life and passion for literature and education that greatly influenced her children: Rublee A. Cole (b. March 4, 1862, d. July 3, 1907) and Jessie Martha Cole (b. July 8, 1866, d. October 10, 1947).

Rublee A. Cole graduated in law from the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1883. Afterwards, he first moved to Washburn, and then to Ashland, where he practiced law and served as a Collecting Agent and Notary Public.



*Rublee A. Cole, 1883*

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<sup>15</sup> Untitled obituary at the SCHRC dated June 26, 1920.

Soon he relocated to Portage, where he met and married Janet M. MacDonald (b. April 9, 1863, d. December 26, 1927). After their marriage, the couple moved to Milwaukee, where Rublee continued his work as a lawyer. In one of his more famous cases, he successfully litigated against the Illinois Steel Company for illegally evicting some 200 residents from their properties on Jones Island in Milwaukee.

Early in his career, Rublee Cole was active in the Republican Party. He was a strong supporter of Governor Robert La Follette in his advocacy of minority rights and women's right to vote. Like La Follette, he increasingly viewed the Republican Party as manipulated by industry and the railroads, and as abandoning its anti-slavery origins. Disenchanted, Rublee became a Democrat, and in 1896, he was elected as Lieutenant Governor of the Wisconsin Democratic Party. However, at the state convention his nomination was dropped, mainly because he opposed the Prohibition movement, which he saw as an attack on German communities. He tried to protest the move, but he was shouted down at the convention.

Rublee's wife Janette also was active in education and politics. She was the first licensed teacher in Prentice,<sup>16</sup> and she became the Chairperson of the State Federation of Women's Clubs. In this role she helped pass legislation that allowed women to vote on matters pertaining to school officers. She also championed the admittance of African Americans into the Club.

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<sup>16</sup> She also wrote the entry on "Price County" in *The History of Price County and Prentice Wisconsin*, 1884.



Rublee Cole continued to work as an attorney until 1905, when he became a police justice for West Allis. On July 3, 1907, Rublee Cole died following a two-week illness. He was only forty-five.

Emeline Cole's daughter, Jessie Cole, also had strong interests in literature and education, and like her brother Rublee, she attended the University of Wisconsin at Madison and graduated in 1888.



*Jessie M. Cole, 1888*

However, there were fewer options for women at this time, so Jessie returned to Sheboygan County and taught Latin and German at Plymouth High School. She was a leading member of the Plymouth chapter of the Daughters of the American Republic, the Plymouth Women's Club, County Educational Board, Committee on Common Schools, and twice elected to the County School Commission. By 1902, she was serving as the Assistant Principal of Plymouth High School at which time she declined a nomination for County Superintendent of Schools. She later became an honorary member of the

Plymouth High School Alumni Association. In addition, she was a shrewd businesswoman and bought and sold a number of properties.<sup>17</sup> Jessie Cole never married. She died on October 10, 1947.

Horace and Emeline Rublee's convictions and intellectual endeavors had a lasting impact in their communities and upon the lives of their children, each of whom became influential figures in politics and education. It is inspiring to think that one can trace the educational, political, and material successes of their descendants back to such humble beginnings in the nascent wooded village of Sheboygan Falls.

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<sup>17</sup> E.g., in 1915, she sold a lot on the southwest corner of 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Huron for \$1000, about \$24,000 by today's standard.