

Martha J. Richards

October 4, 1848 – April 6, 1939

**Martha J. Richards, Oldest
Resident of Village, Summoned**

**Passes Away After Attack of Pneumonia;
Rites Conducted**

While many of her friends and acquaintances were unaware of her illness, Mrs. Martha J. Richards, aged 90, beloved Monticello woman and oldest native born resident of the community, died at 3:00 p. m. Sunday in her home here after a three days' illness of pneumonia.

Mrs. Richards became confined to bed last Tuesday afternoon when a cold, with which she had been ailing for a week, grew more serious. She improved very noticeably in the next two days but early Friday morning her condition turned worse, developing into pneumonia. By Saturday forenoon, however, she had rallied so remarkably that much hope was entertained for her recovery, but around midnight, Mrs. Richards weakened perceptibly and it soon became apparent that the end was only a matter of hours.



Sad Blow to Friends

Mrs. Richards' sudden and unexpected death came as a great shock to relatives and friends alike because her excellent mental condition and consistently good health seemed to indicate that she might well live at least another several years. Up to the very time her condition became critical, she was blessed with the same keen sense of humor and alert mentality which not only amazed friends and acquaintances, but had won their admiration as well.

Born in Hay Shanty

Martha Jane Lewis was born in Mt. Pleasant township Oct. 4, 1848, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Lewis, who only a few months before had traveled to this territory from the state of Indiana in a covered wagon. For six weeks the family camped at Attica, then known as Winneshiek, while Mr. Lewis inquired about the country in search of a farm location. Construction was not yet completed on the log cabin, which was to be the family home on what is now the Ernest Strahm farm—the farm site eventually chosen by Mr. Lewis—when the daughter, Martha Jane, was born in the hay shanty in which the family was living temporarily. In the days of her girlhood this territory was a wilderness; Indians roamed the countryside and there was wild game in abundance.

On April 24, 1870, Martha Jane Lewis was married to John Richards. For the next several years, they farmed in Mt. Pleasant township, removing to Monticello in 1877. Mr. Richards became successfully engaged in business here, first as manager of the old Grange store and later as its owner. He died in 1899.

Except for a few years, Mrs. Richards always had resided in Monticello since moving here from the farm east of the village. Three years she spent in Madison while her youngest son, John S., was attending the University of Wisconsin.

Known as “Grandma”

“Grandma” Richards, as she was affectionately known to friend closest the family, was a rare refreshing individual, whose radiant, forceful personality and home-spun philosophy of life were like breaths of fresh air in the mad frenzy of this rapidly changing world. With surprising perception for one of her years, she spread humor at the slightest opportunity, converting dull and uninteresting situations in to laughter with the sparkle of her never-failing joviality. She was a source of great comfort and reassurance because her optimistic nature always saw hope where others say only pessimism or despair. Triumphant over the countless adversities into which she was born in the real pioneer days, “Grandma” Richards had learned through self-discipline and education the graceful art of steeling her self against the withering effects of life’s tragedies and permitting only the happier, finer things to mould her character. Situations, which to many people might have appeared serious and insurmountable, were relatively trivial and easy of solution to her because she had developed such a healthy and cheerful outlook on life and its myriad problems.

Mrs. Richards was a great lover of nature and she was never happier than when she was grooming her many flowers and plants. She was especially fond of pansies because she said, “they just seem to talk to me.”

A prolific reader, “Grandma” Richards had read hundreds of novels, also keeping abreast of current political and other events by reading her daily newspaper. Her youthfulness of mind as well illustrated by the fact that her reading even extended into the realm of athletic events chronicled in the daily press. Her fondness of reading was so deeply rooted that when some of her grandchildren presented her with a radio as a Christmas gift several years ago, she laughingly requested them to “Take this tin contraption out of the house.” She soon developed into an ardent radio enthusiast, however, enjoying several favorite programs every day and evening.

“Life is what we make it” seemed to be the underlying principle of this grand little woman and she was a wonderful example of its successful application to life’s problems. Right up the inception of her illness, she had been active and did for herself because she believed that her activity was the reason for her excellent health.

“Grandma” Richards was a member of the Free Will Baptist church which, before its discontinuance here years ago, held its meetings in the old stone structure at the north end of Main street. For long years she read a chapter in the bible every day. She was the last of a family of 11 children, three of her brothers – David, Sam and Alfred having served in the Civil war.

Final Rites Conducted

Funeral services for Mrs. Richards were conducted at 2 p. m. Wednesday in the Voegeli funeral home here by the Rev. H. R. Kinley, pastor of the Caledonia Avenue Methodist church at La Crosse and formerly of Monticello, it having been her wish that he preside at the services. Interment was in Railroad Avenue cemetery. Pallbearers were: Roswell S. Richards, Howard D. Kennedy and Edwin S. Kennedy, all of Monticello, grandsons of the deceased; and H. A. Walters and W. D. Elmer, both of this village. The services were largely attended.

List of Survivors

Survivors are one daughter, Mrs. C. D. Kennedy, and two sons, S. Earle Richards, for 40 years publisher of the Monticello Messenger before his retirement about three years ago, and John S. Richards, assistant principal of the Monticello high school; seven grandchildren, Mrs. Charles J. Niles, Monroe; Kenneth R. Kennedy, Knoxville, Tenn.; Mrs. Roy Greenwalt,

Brodhead; Postmaster Roswell S. Richards, Howard D. Kennedy, Edwin S. Kennedy, and John M. Richards, all of Monticello.

A son, Dane C. Richards, rural mail carrier here for nearly 33 years, also preceded her in death, having been fatally injured in a hunting accident last Oct. 27.