



**The Todd House Museum**

## **TABOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**February 2019 Newsletter**  
Chuck Douglass President

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### **Society News**

Chuck Douglass

Happy new year to our membership! At the start of a new year we all take stock of financial matters and the Tabor Historical Society is no different. As you probably know, our society is staffed entirely by volunteers who generously donate their time to preserve the records and artifacts of Tabor's past. The society maintains an impressive amount of material, well over 8,000 items large and small: everything from letters written by town fathers in the 1840s to a 1946 McCormick Farmall tractor.



What most folks don't know (or appreciate) is the fact that we receive no regular funding from local, state or federal governments. Although we occasionally apply for and receive grants for special projects, our day-to-day operating expenses must be raised entirely through membership dues, fund-raising events and donations; and as you can guess, it's a continuing challenge. In addition to our large archival collection, we maintain four buildings: The John Todd House Museum, constructed in 1853, a general museum and storage

building and the Grudle Farm Machinery building (both built in 1995), and the old Tabor College Music Hall, erected in 1875.

We currently pay over \$7,000 a year for utilities, phone service and insurance as well as for routine maintenance and unexpected repairs that periodically pop up. Even relatively small expenses add up over time, including the printing and mailing of this newsletter (please let us know if you can receive the newsletter via email). Any special projects, like the upcoming restoration of the Todd House porch, are accounted for separately and require independent fund-raising efforts.

We have been more than fortunate over the years that the community of Tabor has supported our work and we anticipate they will continue to do so in the future—for those who have moved away but remain friends and supporters, we also thank you. Please remember our society is a 501(c)3 organization and your membership dues and any other monetary gifts are tax deductible. Thanks again for your support!

## Harriet Townshend: Tabor Missionary

Harry Wilkins

Tabor was founded in 1852 as a Christian community built around a college that was open to everyone regardless of gender or race. The first graduating class of the Tabor Literary Institute, the forerunner to the college, included Harriet Eliza Townshend, daughter of one of the town's pioneer families. Like her parents Isaac and Emiline, Harriet was deeply committed to her faith and was a sustaining member of the Congregational Church. She also believed strongly in education and, after leaving the literary institute in 1862, became a public school teacher. But over time she became restless, feeling the need to "enlarge her views of the Christian life." In 1867 she volunteered her services to the Boston-based Women's Board of Missions as a teacher in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

Harriet left Tabor August 13, 1867, for the arduous journey to the Jaffna district of Ceylon, home to the Hindu Tamil people. Ceylon was a world apart from Harriet's Iowa. She found herself in a windy, lowland tropical land drenched by monsoon rains in the winter and baked by the sun in the summer. With its rice fields, coconut trees and native elephants, the region presented an exciting and wholly unfamiliar culture and geography. Harriet worked with a small group of Americans under the leadership of an ordained minister and was one of several teachers assigned to the boarding school which housed Tamil girls ages 6-14. Harriet's charges learned the gospels along with reading, writing and arithmetic; older girls were exposed to philosophy, history and astronomy.

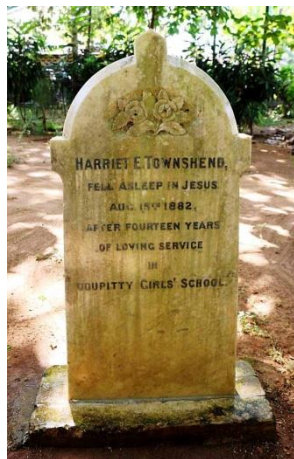
Harriet wrote letters to her family, friends, and former students in Iowa describing her work and her admiration for her young students. In one letter she wrote that her



Harriet Eliza Townshend

girls "can read pretty well—know the geography of Ceylon and India and add and subtract mentally. When they learn to write they may send you letters of their own." Harriet also felt duty-bound to help Tabor College's natural history museum: she sent the school a 500-pound box with 150 varieties of shells and "articles of curiosity from different parts of the island and some from India." To her childhood friend Maria Gaston, Harriet wrote that she wanted "all the Tabor children who have ever been to school with me or in my Sabbath school class to have a shell from Ceylon."

Harriet's long exposure to difficult living conditions, a harsh climate, and tropical diseases took their toll and her health began to fail. She came home to Tabor in the spring of 1877 to recuperate but returned too soon to Ceylon, over the objections of her friends and family. She never fully regained her strength and became progressively weaker, passing on August 15, 1882. She was 40 years old. Harriet was buried near her school in Ceylon.



Harriet's resting place in Sri Lanka

Harriet's legacy is best summed up in a letter she wrote to a friend: "I could not have pleasanter surroundings or a better home, kinder friends or more satisfying work. The school is doing beautifully and we are now a happy household."

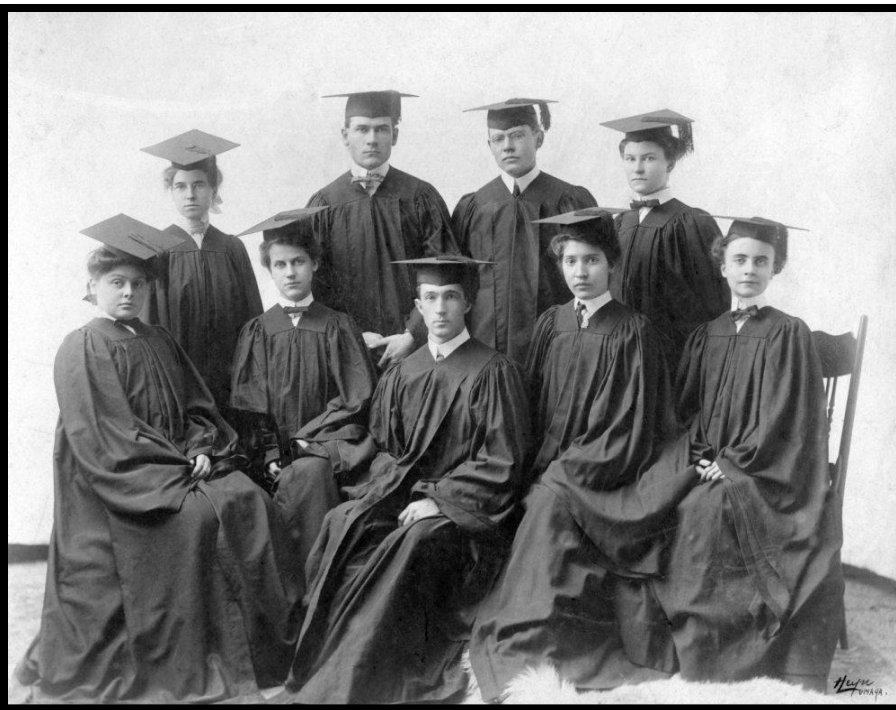
## ***Did you know?***

Tabor College operated between 1866 and 1927 and during that time more women than men graduated. Although several thousand attended the school over its 61 years of service and as many as 300 were enrolled at any one time, only 360 graduated with a four-year degree: 159 men and 201 women. The average graduating class size was six and the largest class size was 14, occurring in 1896, 1902 and 1910. The number of graduates seems small by today's standards but in 1905 for example, only six percent of the U.S. population had graduated from high school and a scant one percent had earned a college degree.

The college was the culmination of a dream of Tabor founders George Gaston, Samuel Adams and Reverend John Todd to establish a Christian school west of the Mississippi River, along the lines of Ohio's Oberlin College, Todd's alma mater. Like Oberlin, Tabor College provided a Christian education to anyone who applied and met the entrance requirements, a rarity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The college advertised itself as a safe haven for those who wanted to "avoid evil influences" and a strict code of conduct was enforced. Among other things, students were not permitted to smoke or drink and church attendance on Sundays was mandatory. Attendance at a weekly Bible class was also required. Although founded on Christian ideals, the school's curriculum was comparable to any four-year liberal arts institution and bachelor's degrees could be earned in a variety of disciplines. There was a preparatory program (equivalent to a high school), departments for business, teaching, and art and a music conservatory. Tuition was always kept low (\$13.00 a semester in 1897-98, for example) to ensure accessibility by all income groups and many attended part-time as "irregular students."

Tabor College graduates became educators, ministers, scientists, lawyers, musicians, government workers and judges. Among the group was a U.S. Solicitor General, a U.S. Senator and Jessie Field Shambaugh, founder of 4-H.



**Tabor College's Class of 1903. Jessie Field Shambaugh is seated, second from right. Fred C. Laird, center front, became a Nebraska judge. The class was known as the "Naughty Threes"**

## Patiently Waiting for Spring in 1857

The Tabor Historical Society maintains the letters and journals of Reverend John Todd which include fascinating glimpses of life on the Iowa frontier during some exceptional winters.

On January, 19, 1857, Todd wrote to his father-in-law Q.C. Atkins, living in Ohio, describing the miserable Tabor weather: "We are having the most severe winter by far that I ever witnessed. It came down upon us on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December with two days [of a] Northeast snow storm – snowing & blowing & driving & freezing & not a week has passed since without a repetition of that terrific scene, tho' something less severe, but always colder. Last Thursday morning the thermometer was down to 22 below zero – on the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> it was 28 below zero – the coldest that we have ever known it here – 4 degrees colder than the coldest last winter. At 9 o'clock the hour of our Sabbath school the mercury had risen to 19 below & this morning at 9 o'clock after the wind had been for more than 24 hours from the South the mercury stood at 6 below. We have had good sleighing ever since the first of December & the repeated snows have filled in the beaten track with snow in places it is high as the top of the fences. We have heard of several persons being frozen to death, including one of our citizens. The winter has been very severe on the stock & many of the feeble ones have fallen victims to its severity. Farmers have more commonly left their fodder to stand in the shock until they wanted it to feed out, & this winter the driving winds have filled the shocks with snow & then a subsequent storm commenced with rain & sleet so that it is crusted over with ice-- next to impossible to get it & then of little value when it is obtained. Some of our farmers, wearied with efforts to get the fodder to the cattle, have turned the cattle to the fodder.



Like many pioneers, Todd took winter's miseries in stride. Some entries from his journal:

"Set out before sunrise for Magnolia via Exira [Iowa]. Mercury below zero and strong wind in face—reached Exira, 18 miles, before noon—took dinner with Deacon Bush. PM crossed a howling wilderness of prairie and reached Bowman's Grove at dark." December 31, 1866

"Snow 18 inches deep. Cut wood." December 7, 1868

"Took the hack [paid taxi] & reached C. Bluffs at 9 P.M. Wind in NW & blowing cold." January 12, 1881

"P.M. went with wife to Brother Gardner's and Brother Osborn's. Evening prayer meeting. Sleighting is done over snow in places as high as the fences." March 16, 1881

"Cut wood at home all day (five degrees)." March 19, 1883

Ever conscious of his civic duties Todd recorded on March 25, 1891, that he "went to Sidney [on] horseback in a snowstorm and paid taxes." The pastor was 73 years old.

## ***Keep it Brief!***

In 2018 the Tabor Historical Society got into the swing of celebrating Halloween when members Harry and Jeanne Wilkins dressed as John and Martha Todd to hand out candy to Trick-or-Treaters from the front porch of the Todd's landmark home. The weather was spectacular and the kids streamed by for what seemed like hours—around 300 received their treat and more than a few were amazed that the house, normally locked and dark on Halloween, was open. Several children were very surprised and asked “Are you *really* Mr. and Mrs. Todd!?”



**Costumes at the Todd House, 2018**



## **Costumes in Tabor . . . in 1914!**



On New Year's Eve Miss Lillian Hurlbutt (back row, center) hosted what the Tabor Beacon described as a “quaint and jolly” gathering for her Sunday school class at her home on west Elm Street. The young women attending the ‘Old Maid’s Party’ came “attired in the old-fashioned and antique.” The paper reported “some rousing good games and music” followed by a “splendid three course banquet.”

The photograph was taken by the Congregational Church pastor, Charles Fisher.

## Upgrading the Museum

The society is making a few changes to its museum building to better utilize space. Over the summer a wall was constructed by Chuck Douglass and Sterling Fichter cutting the long building into two sections. Dividing the building provides much needed storage space for historical artifacts without affecting current and planned displays.



Susan Shepherd (left) and Kathy Douglass (right) at work painting the recently constructed museum wall in October, 2018.



**Please remember that the Tabor Historical Society depends entirely on dues and donations to pay the bills. Have you paid your dues this year?**

## *Yesterday and Today . . .*

A recently discovered photograph of the bridge at the intersection of Bluff Road and Waubonsie Ave. west of Tabor, about two miles east of Bartlett, in 1906, and the same crossing today.



1906



2018