

Journal of the

**LANCASTER COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Susan Carpenter Frazer

by Marion Wallace Reninger

Miss Susan Carpenter Frazer was undoubtedly the "great lady" of Lime Street if not of Lancaster in her day.

She was born in Lancaster in 1852 and lived her entire life here. Her home at 38 North Lime Street was situated in the heart of the city, with distinguished neighbors surrounding her. Two doors below at 34 North Lime Street lived her pastor, the Rev. James Y. Mitchell, D.D., and his family. Two doors north at 42 North Lime lived the Attorney General of Pennsylvania, the Honorable William Uhler Hensel.

The Brenneman family with its Major Frank Brenneman and Ella Brenneman's husband, the distinguished artist Baron Leon Von Ossko, lived across the street. A. Herr Smith and his sister Eliza lived nearby.

Miss Frazer came of old Lancaster County families on both sides. She was the daughter of the late Colonel Reah Frazer (1804-1856) and his wife Abbiann Steel Frazer (1821-1887). Reah Frazer, her father, was an attorney. He studied law in the office of Amos Ellmaker and was admitted to the Bar in 1825. Of a buoyant disposition, he expressed ardent and enthusiastic zeal to all his cases. He knew no moderation and could convince a jury by his own personality. He was a leading Democrat of Lancaster County. Throughout Pennsylvania he was known as the "War Horse of Lancaster County." However, he was not a close friend either of James Buchanan or of Thaddeus Stevens, his Lancaster contemporaries.

"Up to the time of his death," writes his biographer, Alex. Harris, "he was industrious, persevering, conspicuous and powerful."

Miss Frazer's mother was a descendant of the Steel and Carpenter families, notable members of the Lancaster community. Several of their sons, Susan's brothers, died in early life; but the most prominent who lived until 1919 was Reah Frazer, Jr. He was a Commodore and Paymaster in the U. S. Navy, of a national reputation.

Miss Frazer had a very wide circle of friends. Both her men and women neighbors paid her the greatest respect and admiration. The closest of her men friends was Horace Kennedy. He lived with his widowed mother on East King Street near Ann after coming as a young man to Lancaster from near Paradise. He became a well-known newspaper man. In his later years he was elected the Mayor of Lancaster. When bicycling became the fashion, he and Susan Frazer rode a tandem wheel on Lime Street.

She entertained the leading citizens of Lancaster in her home. Yet, as a child, I recall her kindly interest in the children in her neighborhood. She always had something to talk about to us and gave us her complete attention. She was a cousin of my aunt in Chambersburg, Emma Frazer Wallace. Once when Miss Sue had sent, as a sympathy gift to my mother, a delicious dessert called "Floating Island," in a priceless heritage bowl of hers, my brother Allan, then 17, was returning the bowl to her. Orange Street had a film of ice; and in sliding down our street on the way to Lime, he slipped and her heritage bowl was broken. To his abject apologies and humiliation, she responded with full forgiveness. She became his good friend until her old age. Then she would sit next to him in a back pew in church and ask him to nudge her if she fell asleep during the sermon, which happened frequently.

In her middle years, she rented rooms to paying guests in her large house. They were always people she knew personally or were highly recommended by friends. In those days her door was always open, and one met the nicest people going in or out to see Miss Frazer or her guests.

One of our favorite teachers at Miss Stahr's School lived in the third floor attic room; and as school girls, we all felt welcome to climb the flights of stairs to call on our beloved and gay Miss Phe-mister of Boston. Several winters Mrs. Gibbons, a friend of Miss Sue's, and her daughter Wilhelmina who lived in Bird-in-Hand, would stay for the winter at Miss Frazer's home, while Wilhelmina attended Miss Stahr's School in Lancaster.

In good weather, Miss Sue sat out on her front porch for hours. Hardly anyone passing by would miss the cheery greeting or short conversation from the old lady as the years passed. She was known and respected throughout the city. People called her "*Our Miss Sue.*"



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However, Miss Frazer was best known for her place in community affairs. It was rather rare to be a club woman in those days; but even as a young woman, she belonged to the patriotic societies. She was a member of the "Daughters of the Cincinnati" in New York. After serving as Regent of the Donegal Chapter of the D. A. R., she was later made Honorary State Regent. She was a charter member of the "Robert Fulton Chapter of the Daughters of 1812." When a group of the Colonial Dames of Pennsylvania organized a Lancaster Committee, she was one of a rather small number who were eligible. She helped to organize the Lancaster branch of the Needlework Guild. She served as a member of the Board of the "Ann C. Witmer Home for Women." A life-long member of the First Presbyterian Church, she bequeathed a Tiffany stained glass window to the Sanctuary in memory of her parents and brothers. The lid of the chalice used in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

in this church is studded with the personal diamonds she left for that purpose.

A number of portraits by the Lancaster artists Eichholz and Armstrong are in the building of the Lancaster County Historical Society at her bequest.

But it is as the president of the Iris Club for ten years that Miss Frazer did most for the women of the community. The Iris Club had been founded in 1895 by Miss Alice Nevin, a member of that illustrious family! She was followed as President by Miss Martha G. Kline and Miss Daisy Brooke Grubb. Then in 1906, Miss Frazer was elected president. I will quote some extracts from the Iris Club minutes:—

“Miss Frazer was elected and Miss Grubb handed the gavel to her at the last meeting of the year May 12, 1906. As a parting gift, Miss Grubb presented the money for a new sideboard in the dining room of the club—amount \$80.00. Miss Frazer in her address expressed the pleasure her election gave her and her determination to show by earnest endeavor the honor done her. She called on the members for strong help and support and suggested each one bring a new member to the club rolls. A musicale and the usual tea followed.” Also—

“Miss Frazer’s first meeting as president took place October 3, 1906.”

From a later extract of the club minutes we read,

“On October 5, 1908, delegates were elected to represent the Iris Club at the Annual State Federation Convention to be held in Pittsburgh. At this convention the Iris Club was asked to help support a bill before the Pennsylvania State Legislature for shortening women’s work hours. Requests were to be signed and sent to the State legislators.” Other entries:—

“January 23, 1909, a room was furnished by the Iris Club for use by the Charity Society for the Needy.”

“On February 6, 1909, the Iris Club asked City Council to remove obnoxious signs on West King Street.”

“It was announced by Miss Frazer, President, that the Eastern District of Pennsylvania Women’s Clubs will be entertained by and in the Iris Club on March 31, 1909. She had been invited to give the address of welcome to the delegates.”

“It was reported by Miss Frazer that the Board of Managers had moved that the Club take up the question of an Anti-Tuberculosis Society in this city and county to work with the Society in Philadelphia. Then the motion was made and carried to hold a public meeting and organize a society for Lancaster City and County.” This was carried out later.

“On April 4, 1908, Miss Mary Warfel, the harpist and member of the Iris Club, made her first appearance at a Recital of Piano and Harp at the Club. Mr. Harry Saylor gave baritone solos at this recital.”

“At an early May meeting Miss Frazer announced that the Ben Greet players would give a performance of a Shakespeare play at the Franklin and Marshall Campus on May 19. She urged the Iris Club members to lend their support to this noteworthy performance.”

“At an Iris Club meeting a motion was presented that the Club members join the Woman’s Suffrage Movement group, then being organized in Lancaster. This was strongly opposed by many of the members and voted down.” Miss Frazer herself was an Anti-Suffragist throughout her term as president of the Iris Club.

The Iris Club became the scene of many other meetings and social events in Lancaster. It was rented throughout the later years by the Cliosophic Society for the monthly meetings of “town and gown” as it was originally labeled. Then the “town” entertained in their homes and the “gowns” from Franklin and Marshall College gave the papers. Miss Frazer was a charter member of the Clio.

On January 15, 1930, Miss Frazer died. She had never married, but her life was full and eventful.