

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian



Katherine Belle Rowley 1870-1936

Vol.IX 2-26-87 No.8

Katherine B. Rowley was born on May 19, 1870, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Rowley of Gaines. She received her early education in the district school and later attended Albion High School from which she graduated. After her graduation, she taught district school. In the latter part of her life she confined her attention to the management of her farm. Her family home was located on the southeast corner of Ridge Road and Crandall Road which in Miss Rowley's time was known as the Rowley Road. On Thanksgiving Day 1917, the old Rowley homestead burned to the ground. By the following year 1918, she had rebuilt on the same site the present Colonial style house now owned by James Ging.

The accompanying portrait is perhaps her high school graduation picture. (Note: the Orleans County Department of History would like to acquire a picture of Miss Rowley when she was older.) Those who remember her will recall that later in life she was a rather robust appearing individual affectionately known as "Kit".

Upon her death an Albion newspaper gave tribute to her by saying in part: "The sudden death of Miss Katherine B. Rowley this morning is a distinct loss to Orleans County. A recognized authority on early Orleans history, Miss Rowley was a descendant of a pioneer family who took an active part in the early development of Gaines. For years she had spent her spare time in research in county history and was influential in having markers placed at historic spots along the Ridge Road." Indeed, these markers exist today along the historic Ridge. One located at Murray bespeaks the 200th birth of Washington and of the Revolutionary soldiers from the Town of Murray. Another at Transit Road and Route 104 tells of the Connecticut Tract of land and the Holland Land Purchase. A large monument at Gaines near the Congregational Church speaks of the trek of DeWitt Clinton along the Ridge in 1810. And still another, although smaller in size, is located at Childs in the front lawn of the residence built by John Proctor, known as the Paul Revere of the Ridge Road. Although all these bronze and stone markers were erected by the DAR in the 1930's they were done under Miss Rowley's influence and remain today as an indelible reminder of her enthusiasm for pioneer history.

In 1926 she authored a 24-page booklet entitled The Historic Ridge which was printed by the DAR and "Dedicated to the memory of the Pioneers who blazed the trail for us to follow after." She also had planned to chronicle in book form many anecdotes of pioneer life which she had gathered. On May 14, 1934 Katherine B. Rowley was appointed Orleans County Historian by the Orleans County Board of Supervisors. In this capacity she was responsible for compiling a permanent record of historical data and military statistics on the Civil War and the World War veterans.

Miss Rowley was one of the very first people locally to actively collect antiques. She was an active member of the DAR and served as State Chairman of the Old Trails Committee of that organization. She was also a member of the Orleans County Pioneer Association and the Albion Historical Club. She was a member of the Gaines Congregational Church. On June 17, 1936 she died suddenly at her home of angina pectoris.

Her love of the historic Ridge Road was a paramount. Concerning this facet of history, she was indeed the J. Howard Pratt of her era. This love of the Ridge is so very evident in her writing. The following quotation from The Historic Ridge is testimony to that fact: "...we, the DAR inheriting the ideals and aims of our highminded ancestors must pause - and looking backward 'o'er the sands of time' study with renewed interest those ideals and aspirations which so inspired our ancestors that they willingly braved the terrors of an unknown wilderness and were enabled to begin their new life miles distant from any other human habitation - and with faith in their God and faith in themselves - to begin a new life - a life given unreservedly for the benefit of those who should live when they were gone - a career of hardship and unremitting toil freely devoted to the coming generations, - and in no place is this better exemplified nor worthy of study - than pursuing the history of the old Ridge Road."