

## CHAPTER IV.

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**HENRY BRADBURY COONS AND HIS DESCENDANTS.**

Henry B. Coons, the fifth child born to John and Sarah (Bradbury) Coons, was one of the very early white children to be born in the lead region. His birth occurred on January 30, 1829 at Gratiot's Grove, Michigan Territory, where his parents then resided in a strongly built story and a half log cabin. There were no nurses and no hospital to attend him and his mother. It is doubtful if even a doctor were in attendance. A midwife from among the neighbors probably performed the essential duties.

When Henry was two years old he journeyed to St. Louis with his mother who appropriately timed her visit to her parent's home to secure better care for the birth of Henry's brother, Samuel, born March 19, 1831.

Henry was but little over three years old when the Black Hawk war broke out. The mother and children, as recited in the previous chapter, were removed to a place of greater security at Galena.

At the age of approximately five years, Henry moved to the mouth of Catfish Creek west of the Mississippi, where Dubuque now stands. After three years there, the family moved to Old Belmont; and within a year, or less than two, to LaFayette. It was here that Henry first attended school in the first school house erected in Snake Hollow, 1838. Henry, his brother, Samuel, and two cousins were among those who attended that first year and under the tutelage of a veteran of the Revolution, Cornelius Kennedy.

The only schooling Henry received was in this log cabin school and at his mother's knee. It speaks well for his

teachers, his parents and himself that from these meagre opportunities he became a man of more than usual literary and scientific learning. He was a lover of books. Dickens and Carlyle were favorite authors. He possessed at his death complete sets of the works of these men.

Fossils and minerals commanded his interest. Of them he made a large and classified collection, gathered in Wisconsin and elsewhere. Letters were found among the papers of his son, John, who died in early manhood, asking that specimens be sent to him from Kentucky.

In early manhood Henry resided for one year on Lake Superior. (This statement was furnished to the compiler of the Wisconsin Blue Book for 1871 by Henry himself.) What his activities were at this outpost, where he was located, or what the year are lost in time.

In 1853 he became a Mason and until his death took much interest in the work of his lodge.

For three years, from 1856 to 1859, he was in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. In the latter year he returned to Potosi, where he resided the balance of his life except for a temporary absence in Montana from 1864 to 1866.

On the 9th of May, 1859, Henry was married to Clara Phebe White\* of Potosi. The ceremony that united this couple who lived together almost fifty years before death separated them was performed by Reverend Father Gibson, the resident priest of St. Thomas church of Potosi. (The history of this church would make an interesting study. It was organized in 1836, built of logs in 1838, and generally cared for until 1840, when a resident priest was obtained by the zealous Father Mazzuchelli, to whom southern Wisconsin is so largely indebted for religious and educational institutions.)

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\* The name is sometimes found as Clarissa Phoebe; but it appears herein as the subject, her mother, and her father wrote it.

It was said earlier in this writing that in respect to two persons the narrative would depart from the direct Coons' line. The first of these was John Bradbury; the second is Clara Phebe White, the bride of Henry B. Coons.

#### CLARA PHEBE WHITE.

Clara Phebe White was born in Chateaugay, New York, June 17, 1834. In 1842 she came with her parents to Plum Grove, Illinois. At the age of twelve she went to live with her half brother, James White, in Potosi. The wife of James White was a most estimable woman, Mary Weld, born and bred in New England, and married to James White in 1838 in Galena. Her brother, Hiram Weld, started the enterprise in 1835 of a ferry from the mouth of Snake Hollow to Weld's Landing across the river. The location of this across-river route is still known to boatmen as Specht's Ferry. The first frame house built in the present village of Potosi was occupied by James and Mary White.

To this home, which was a large one, came a half-orphaned girl of twelve in 1846. The house being large and commodious, itinerants were accommodated. The foster mother soon realized that that in such an atmosphere the adolescent girl should not remain. After providing such educational facilities as the village furnished, James and Mary sent Clara Phebe at the age of eighteen to St. Josephs College in Dubuque. Here the young lady received her higher education and here she joined the Catholic Church, to which faith she adhered until death.

After the completion of her work at St. Josephs, Clara Phebe returned to Potosi and made her home with her half-brother until her marriage.

That her days were not idle is indicated by the activities of the White household. Frequently after Clara Phebe's

return from Dubuque, the following, or similar announcement, appeared in the "Potosi Republican":

"Public House

JAMES WHITE Has opened his house located on North St., Potosi, for the accommodation of the travelling community, for the reception of transients and permanent boarders. He will endeavor to keep as good a table as the times will permit at reasonable charges. Horses provided for at a good stable, and by attentive ostlers."

What the "reasonable charges" were makes an interesting speculation. Newspaper items of that approximate time indicate that beef was \$3.00 a hundredweight; ham, 8¢ to 9¢ a pound; cornmeal, 60¢ a bushel; and eggs, 10¢ a dozen. The town boasted a bakery run by Ennor and Hays, but the "White House" no doubt produced its own breads and pastries. Perhaps on occasion there was served as dessert a novel refreshment from the Ice Cream Saloon of Pascal Mallett.

No foundation except probability is found for the statement that Henry Bradbury Coons was a frequent customer at White's public house. His mother and father were dead, and he was without a permanent home.

The ancestry of Clara Phebe White is not complete. Perhaps if more time and money were available, original records could be secured. For the table given below, acknowledgment is given to Bertha Wilson of Denver, whose grandmother was a sister of Clara Phebe.

..... Frost	
Sarah Frost, dau. m. ....	Dewey of Conn.
Theodosia Dewey, dau. m. ....	White of Vermont
(White had been previously married and had two sons, James and Benjamin, and other children)	
(Clara Phebe White, dau. of Theodosia Dewey and	
(	..... White, m. Henry B. Coons
(	Hannah White, dau. of Theodosia Dewey and
(	..... White, m. .... Armstrong

After the death of ..... White, Theodosia married Wm. Blute. At the time of her death she lived in Palatine or Plum Grove, Illinois.

It is clear that the only full sister or brother of Clara Phebe was Hannah, by marriage, Armstrong.

In a letter written September 5, 1853 to her daughters, Hannah and Phebe, in Potosi, Theodosia cautions them about railroad accidents (the railroad was not to reach Potosi for years yet) saying:

“If you ever ride in that way take the back cars. There is not near as much danger.”

Clara Phebe was married May 9, 1859 to Henry Bradbury Coons, whom she survived about a year. She died from paralysis on April 10, 1909 at the age of 74 years, at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Theodore Runkel, in Potosi, Wisconsin. She is buried in British Hollow Cemetery.

The obituary in the Dubuque “Times-Journal” recites:

“In her death, this community has lost one of its oldest and most esteemed pioneer residents. She was known by everyone as a good and kind-hearted Christian woman and friend, a fond and faithful wife and a loving and devoted mother. She was a consistent member of the Catholic church and died fortified with all of the rites of the religion.”

#### LIFE AND CHILDREN OF HENRY BRADBURY AND CLARA PHEBE COONS.

After the digression concerning Clara Phebe White, we return to the narrative at the time of her marriage to Henry B. Coons on May 9, 1859. For almost fifty years, until the death of the husband on June 15, 1908, this couple resided in Potosi, Wisconsin.

The activities of Henry B. were numerous. He earned his living as a clerk and live stock dealer. He was also interested in the Potosi steam saw mill. His reputation in

the community is attested by the many public offices he held. During his life he held nearly every public office in the village; for many years serving as town clerk. In 1870 he was elected from the Second District of Grant County to the Wisconsin Assembly.

Throughout his life Henry B. Coons was a faithful Democrat. In his election to the legislature he defeated his Republican opponent, William Wilcox, by 391 votes against 369; and was the only Democrat among the five delegates then elected from Grant County. He served a one-year term in the assembly year of 1871.

To the marriage of Henry B. Coons and Clara Phebe White were born five children, all at Potosi:

1. John S. Coons, born 1860. Died unmarried, February 2, 1880 at Louisville, Kentucky. (See *infra*.)
2. Sallie Coons, born December 4, 1861. (See *infra*.)
3. James Henry Coons, born April 18, 1864. (See *infra*.)
4. William Coons, died very young.
5. Hyman Eugene Coons, born November 3, 1872. (See *infra*.)

During the Civil War economic pressure and the difficulties of feeding a family sent Henry B. Coons to the Rocky Mountains to prospect for gold and silver. He was in the West most of two years between 1864 and 1865. That times were hard is shown by the price of calico, 50¢ a yard; tea, \$2.60 a pound; kerosene, 60¢ a gallon; flour \$5.00 a hundred.

The letters exchanged between husband and wife during this interval show hardship and fortitude on each side.

In August, 1865, Henry wrote from Helena, Montana. He had just received three letters, two from Phebe and one from Sam, his brother. Phebe had reported the family well; but Sam had said, as reported in Henry's letter to Phebe, that there were not

“any hopes of doing anything at home to make a cent.”

It was impossible to have gone home at that time. The letter continues:

“The risk I would have to run in getting home, I have concluded not to attempt it until next June. \* \* \* if I can only raise enough money to pay my passage on a Steam Boat. \* \* \* In remaining in this Country until the Boats come up in the Spring I consider that I am taking the least risks. from all the news I can get from the plains the Indians are desperate and made more so by the handfull of Soldiers the Gov'mt has sent out. \* \* \* The emigrants who are coming now tell awful tales. They say they had to fight their way through, and that the number of emigrants who have lost their lives will never be known except to those who are interested.”

This same letter tells of the prospecting for precious metal. Gulch after gulch had proved fruitless one by one. On the next day he was setting off on horse and with pack pony to prospect in the Last Chance range. If there he had no luck, he would cross the mountains to the other side of the Missouri River and find some “diggings I can make wages on.”

Fortune did not smile! To someone else the riches of Last Chance gulch were revealed. The discoveries subsequently made there produced millions of dollars in gold and silver.

Phebe's letter to Henry dated May 6, 1865, is of interest. First she could not get started until ten o'clock because “the baby (Henry) was very cross and would not go to sleep.”

The war was over:

“There is a hundred thousand dollars offered for Jeff. Davis but I don't think they will get him. There is now not one rebel army in the field. \* \* \* We had a great parade here at the Presbyterian Church last Thursday.”

Henry's numerous letters were appreciated. Phebe was provoked because Mrs. B..... said,

“he is the biggest fool out of jail, he will spend all he can make buying postage stamps.”

After the return from the West, Henry ran for Register of Deeds of Grant County in 1869 but was defeated. In 1870, as previously related, he was elected to the legislature. In 1877, after having already served seven years prior to 1871 as town clerk, he was again a candidate for that office.

The election must have been a close one for relatives and friends were invited in from the country to vote. Particularly Aunt Eliza (daughter of John R. and Sarah) and her family were expected. (Letter, Sallie Coons to her brother Johnie, April 3, 1877.)

The simple, wholesome family life of Henry and Phebe is revealed in a letter from Phebe to her son Johnie in Kentucky, January 28, 1877. The family had been sleigh riding on the Mississippi the day before, and had crossed over to Iowa to visit the trout ponds. As the mother wrote to the absent son of 17, Gene, age 5, was cracking nuts and singing. Henry, 13, and Sallie, 16, were at Sunday School. A travelling photographer had just taken their pictures. “Pa and Kinneys have gone out for a ride as usual.” “The young folks have a Lyceum and seem to enjoy it.”

The death of Phebe has been previously related. Henry B. Coons died June 15, 1908 at the age of 79 years, and was buried in British Hollow Cemetery. He left three surviving children, all then residing in Potosi.

## THE CHILDREN OF HENRY B. COONS.

## 1.

## John S. Coons.

John S. Coons, known to the family as Johnie, was born in Potosi, Wisconsin in 1860. At the age of 17 he went to Louisville, Kentucky as an employee of Brinly, Miles and Hardy, manufacturers of patented plows and cultivators. The Brinlys were relatives, else so young a boy would scarcely have been sent so far from home to seek employment and learn a trade.

On February 2, 1880, in his 20th year, he suddenly became seriously ill with typhoid fever, and died before his parents could be notified. Word was taken from Potosi to his father in Lancaster where the father was in attendance in court as under-sheriff. The messenger's face revealed his tidings and without inquiry the father said, "Johnie is dead."

A telegram was immediately dispatched to Louisville to forward the body of Potosi for burial in the British Hollow Cemetery.

## 2.

## Sallie Coons.

Sallie Coons, daughter of Henry B. and Clara Phebe Coons was born in Potosi, Wisconsin, December 4, 1861. She was educated in the public schools of Potosi, and trained in household arts by her competent mother. Before the age of 20 she was engaged to teach the district school at Jamestown, Wisconsin, a small community whose importance had dwindled as the nearby mines became of lesser importance.

On Sunday, October 16, 1881, she wrote to her mother that she had gone to church and marveled at the \$2900

altar. She roomed and boarded with a Ludwig family in which were two handsome sons, but one was already engaged and the other too young, "so I am left as usual." Her salary was \$27.00 a month for a five month's term.

Apparently the styles of 1881 had one similarity to present day trends for on October 30th, Sallie wrote her mother that she had been scolded by Mrs. Ludwig about her tightly-fitting clothes. The reprimand must have been justified for "I can hardly button both of my polonaise. Am going to let the seams out."

In 1882 a better job was obtained in the village of Sinopee on the Mississippi a few miles above Dubuque. As she there began her work her father wrote her :

"I hope you will make a success of your school and remember that if you steal the money from the district, that is the smallest part of the wrong. They can get more money, but if you steal six months of those children's time, it is lost to them forever."

For a number of terms Sallie taught in Cassville, Wisconsin.

On June 12, 1890 she was married to Theodore H. Runkel by Rev. Sallie of St. Andrew's Catholic Church in Tennyson, Wisconsin.

Mr. Runkel was of German stock, had been a lumber raftsman on Wisconsin rivers; and at the time of his marriage was a young storekeeper in Potosi. He was born in Germantown, Wisconsin, November 26, 1864. He came to Potosi in 1888 to enter the employ of W. H. Hunt, the leading merchant. In 1889 with the advice and backing of friends he branched into business for himself under the name of T. H. Runkel & Co.

To Sallie and her husband two children were born, both at Potosi; first, Percy Bradbury, October 6, 1891; and second, Clara Margaret, January 5, 1899.

The young merchant, Theodore, prospered, and eventu-

ally became sole proprietor of the business. He provided his children with educations at the Platteville Normal, now Platteville State Teachers' College; and indulged their desires for music and music lessons.

On November 13, 1916, the Runkel store was destroyed by fire. A tramp had been confined in the town jail for drunkenness. Thinking to effect an escape, he set fire to the jail; but he not only lost his own life but destroyed much of the business district of the town, including the village hall, the Runkel store, a livery stable, the H. E. Coons hardware store, and a warehouse.

Not daunted by their losses, Runkel and H. E. (Gene) Coons formed a partnership, including Percy, under the name of Runkel-Coons Co., to engage in business in a large and general merchandise and hardware store. A new building was erected, equipped with an electric generator (the first in Potosi); and a stock of merchandise from silks to plows installed.

Hard work and worry took its toll; and on January 31, 1919, Mr. Runkel suffered a stroke. He died February 2nd, without regaining consciousness.

The widow continued to make her home in Potosi, where she resided until her death in 1933.

Sallie Runkel was of a quiet but genial nature. To those who will trouble themselves to learn from others she offered a lesson of value. She had cultivated the habit of avoiding petty annoyances. Hence she was never complaining and ever adaptable.

Sallie Coons Runkel died April 18, 1933 at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Clara Hobbs, in Chicago, Illinois. She was buried close to her parents in British Hollow Cemetery. Death was caused by a cerebral hemorrhage and complications. Funeral services were conducted in the home of her son, Percy, in Potosi, by Rev. Kracker of Dubuque.

Of the children of Sallie Coons and Theodore H. Runkel, as with others of their generation, it is not within the scope of this book to treat at length. Percy Bradbury Runkel was born October 6, 1891. He was graduated from Potosi High School in 1910 and attended Platteville Normal. He was married in 1922 to Vera Scheppele, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Chas. Scheppele of Dubuque. Upon his marriage the Runkel home in Potosi was divided into two apartments, Percy and his wife occupying one, and his mother and sister the other.

Following his father's death, Percy conducted a drug store in Potosi and sold insurance.

On March 27, 1930, a daughter, Miriam Margaret, was born.

In 1934, Percy and his family moved to Dubuque. On July 3, 1936, Percy passed away suddenly at the Finley Hospital in Dubuque. Funeral services were conducted in the Congregational Church in Potosi, Rev. Kracker and Rev. White of Dubuque officiating. Burial was made at British Hollow.

Vera, his widow, and Miriam now reside in Dubuque.

Clara Margaret Runkel, daughter of Sallie Coons Runkel was born at Potosi on January 5, 1899. She was graduated from Potosi High School in 1916 and from Platteville Normal in 1918. She attended summer sessions at the University of Wisconsin. Before marriage she taught in the grammar schools in Potosi and in Madison, Wisconsin. She was married to M. K. Hobbs, an attorney of Chicago, Illinois, on March 24, 1925; and since her marriage has resided in Chicago, where she is active in women's club work and church activities.

Sallie Coons and her daughter at early ages became members of the Order of the Eastern Star. Percy was a Mason.

## 3.

## James Henry Coons.

The subject of this section was born in Potosi April 18, 1864, the third child of Henry B. Coons and Clara Phebe White. He was a precocious child and caused his father some concern because "Henry does not have to work hard at school" (Henry B. to John S., letter October 20, 1877).

Henry was a fast growing youth, and heavy; and at the age of 15 "hired out to Mr. Kinney to make hay". (Clara Phebe to John S., letter August 30, 1879). In 1881, Henry went to work in the Hunt store and "can stay as long as he suits". (Clara Phebe to Sally, letter February 3, 1881).

Reading about the defeat of Tilden in 1876, at the age 12 (Sallie to John S. letter November 13, 1876), Henry apparently lost hope in the Democratic cause; for, unlike his father, he has never been active in politics.

Henry Coons' expertness as a hunter and fisherman is matched only by his wife's skill in preparing the catch for the table.

He is now retired after a busy life as representative for clothing manufacturers.

On August 21, 1901, he married Mae Edwards of Viroqua, Wisconsin. Their married life has been spent in Potosi, save for two or three years spent in Madison to facilitate the education of their sons.

The children, all born in Potosi, are:

a. Donald, born October 18, 1902. Died at the age of 8 of scarlet fever. Buried at British Hollow.

b. Kenneth Coons, born August 8, 1905. Attended the University of Wisconsin. Married Arline Proctor of Sioux City, Iowa, September 4, 1926. Their daughter, Carolyn, born May 31, 1927. The family resides in Sioux

City, where Kenneth is a highly successful automobile salesman.

c. Henry Bradbury Coons, born August 24, 1906. Educated at Platteville Mining School, and Missouri School of Mines. Married Harriet Edmunds of Charleston, West Virginia, January 15, 1938. A son, Henry Bradbury III, was born within the past few months. The family resides in Charleston, where Bradbury is responsibly employed by American Carbide and Chemical Corporation.

## 4.

**Hyman Eugene Coons.**

Gene Coons, youngest child of Henry B. and Clara Phebe, was born November 3, 1872. He was a happy youth, "usually whistling or singing" (Clara Phebe to John S. letter January 27, 1877). Unlike his brother Henry, Gene was a tall, thin boy. Like most youngest children "Gene is a spoiled child", his mother wrote in 1879 to John.

Nor was he always discreet. At the age of nine he "got into trouble by repeating that F..... was tight". (Clara Phebe to Sallie, letter February 3, 1881).

That Gene was inclined to mischief is evidenced by his hurrahs for Hayes while his father wept for Tilden. (Sallie to John, letter, November 13, 1876).

Eugene Coons is an accomplished artisan and mechanic. His handicraft decorates his home and that of his daughter. He has invented several mechanical devices, some of which are patented.

Early he engaged in the hardware business in Potosi, later forming a partnership with his brother-in-law, T. H. Runkel.

On September 11, 1900, at Potosi, Wis., Gene was married

to Mary Ann Fure, born February 25, 1877. Her geniality and hospitality, coupled with her husband's droll humor, make their home pleasant to visit. For the last several years, they have lived in Dubuque.

One child, Mary Kathryn, was born to them—March 25, 1904. She was educated in a Dubuque seminary and at Whitewater Normal School. Before marriage, she was a teacher in Cudahy, Wisconsin. On June 11, 1928, she married Louis J. Huebler of Cudahy, an accountant. Their children, all born in Cudahy, where the family resides are:

Eugene John, born June 12, 1929.

Karl Joseph, born July 3, 1932.

Richard L., born August 21, 1936.