

1-1-1885

## Mrs. Caroline Joy Morton

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebhisttrans>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

"Mrs. Caroline Joy Morton" (1885). *Transactions and Reports, Nebraska State Historical Society*. Paper 42.  
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebhisttrans/42>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Nebraska State Historical Society at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Transactions and Reports, Nebraska State Historical Society by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

## MRS. CAROLINE JOY MORTON.

CAROLINE JOY MORTON was born on the 9th of August, 1833, at Hallowell, in Maine. Her father was Hiram Joy. He was of Irish descent. His ancestry, as far back as the family records in this country go, were seafaring people. They who go down to the sea in ships learn to cast out fear, and meet danger and toil and watching with steady nerve and toughened muscle. Their children have a heritage of courage and resolution, and the breath of the salt sea air is their constant stimulant. Her mother was Caroline Hayden. She, too, was reared in the rugged hill country of Maine, and breathed the same strong air and dwelt among the same stern and vigorous scenes.

Hiram Joy, when a boy, was apprenticed to the trade of a saddler and harness maker. Hard, steady, honest work was his lot, and he bent to it with a native fidelity and docility; and he had a strong desire to help himself. His education was such as the district school of those early days, in that new country, could give. It was not much, but what it was he made wholly his own. And so heritage and education and circumstance all contributed to make him a man—a strong, hard-working, practical, tenacious man. In 1834 he removed to Detroit, Michigan, and followed the trade to which he had been bred. He had early success in it, and kept to it with his natural force and tenacity. In the spring of 1835, after a violent illness of a few weeks, his wife died, leaving the little girl, who was the only pledge of their married life. They only who have had the same experience, or have seen close at hand others in like condition, can understand what a calamity and what a risk were here. The desolate father and the unconscious child—what now should be their way in the world? He was of a temper and a training to find distraction in his work; but she, the little girl, not able to care for herself, nor even know the nature of her loss, according as she should fall into good hands or ill, so was she to be and so was to be her life. Of all sweet charities, the care for little friendless children is the sweetest—in hospitals and orphanages, if more cannot be done—but a home for the tender soul, made its own by the love and pity of strangers, is the best refuge. It is a sad thought of this world and the men and

women in it, how many motherless children there are and how few such homes are open to them.

But happily the little Caroline was one of these few, and she never ceased through all her years to bless her lot—and with good reason. Her mother had near neighbors whom she loved and trusted, and to whom had not come the gift of children, and with her dying breath she charged them with her baby, to rear in virtue and all godliness of living. Deacon David French and Cynthia Eldred French were fit to be so trusted; mild in their ways, loving in their natures, and Christian in their lives, they accepted the charge, and they kept it with fidelity. Afterward she bore the name of Caroline Joy French. Until her marriage their house was her home, and till her death they were to her father and mother, and she was to them a daughter. In 1850 her father Joy removed from Detroit to Chicago. He met the usual vicissitudes of life, but accumulated an ample fortune, enjoyed general respect and confidence, and died in 1868.

Caroline was first sent to an Episcopal school in Canada, opposite Detroit, where she remained until she was nearly fourteen years old. She was then removed to the Wesleyan Seminary at Albion, Michigan, remaining there until nearly seventeen. She was then placed at the celebrated school for girls in Utica, New York, which was under the charge of the Misses Kelley, graduating in her twentieth year. Her school life was much the same as that of such girls generally. Tractable, diligent, conscientious in the prompt performance of all her duties, and at the same time genial, vivacious, generous, and happy, she was a favorite with teachers and scholars alike. To her alma mater she always bore a loving loyalty, and to the Misses Kelley a most affectionate respect and admiration. It always pleased her to speak of them and the school, and she did so as one appreciating what both had done for her.

While she thoroughly mastered what are generally called the solid studies of such schools, she was an apt and delighted pupil in music, drawing, and painting. Her love of music was natural and very strong. She was well instructed upon the piano-forte. When she left school she was a very fine performer on that instrument, her years being considered; and in the other arts she showed taste, skill, and a desire to excel. So many young ladies do something in these ways and give promise of excellence, that it may seem superfluous to men-

tion them. The difference is, that generally when the serious cares of life press upon them they cease their practice, and soon lose the skill which they have gained, while all through her life she almost daily found time, in the midst of many duties and occupations, to study and improve herself in these accomplishments.

Her best education was at home. Through her girlhood her foster-parents loved her tenderly, as the best natural parent loves his own child. But their affection was judicious. She was made to understand that her business in her girlhood was to do everything and omit nothing that would improve her physical, mental, and moral nature. She was taught that health was to be cared for as well as books, and that kindness, charity, and regard and respect for others, were as necessary as any advantage personal to herself. Definite religious training was imparted. The clear, decisive, positive teachings of religion were constantly impressed upon her mind, and she accepted them with docility and faith. She never forgot them, and when in her turn children were given to her, she seriously and rigidly imposed on them what she had received. But she was not only taught all sound religious knowledge, but she was trained to the conscientious performance of religious duties. She was not reared in a dark, austere, formal, ascetic system. Religion was to her the thankful enjoyment of all the good gifts of God, and her service to her divine Lord was willing, sweet, and sincere.

There was also another line of instruction for her. Her mother carefully taught her the duties of good housewifery. The art of wholesome cooking, and the other work of the well-regulated kitchen, and the care and service of chamber, dining-room, and parlor, were familiar to her even as a child. And amidst it all was one lesson of prime value which she learned and never forgot; it was the ethics of use, and the immorality of waste. She was generous, she was made on too large and liberal a mould to be penurious, or to deny herself or her children, or any others whose pleasure was in her care, any proper indulgence; but she was taught that wastefulness, even in the little things about the house, as well as criminal extravagance, was wrong and led to other wrongs.

At this time she was in person and mien a striking and handsome young woman; tall, slender, vigorous, active, and graceful, with luxuriant brown hair, hazel eyes, clear, dark complexion, always dressed

with taste and a due regard to occasion and circumstance, she was observed and admired by all who saw her. Her genial, cordial, gentle manners; her direct, honest, vivacious conversation; her pure, truthful, sincere nature drew to her the affections of all who knew her.

Her circumstances were very happy. Her father lavished upon his only child all his affections, and they who stood to her as father and mother were very indulgent, giving her all that wealth can buy and the largest freedom consistent with their Christian convictions and teachings. And so it was that, inheriting from her ancestry, hardened by the sea, a strong, resolute, and vigorous nature, receiving from those who were charged with her care the nurture and training of loving, Christian parents, and educated in the best methods of the best schools, she entered upon the duties and responsibilities of life an admirable Christian woman. Everybody wished her God-speed.

At the age of fourteen she was engaged to be married to him who became her husband. Nor in all her girlhood had she any experience incompatible with her promise, nor did her heart ever for a moment draw back from it. In fulfillment of that early betrothal, on the 30th of October, 1854, at the residence of David French, corner of Congress and Brush streets, Detroit, she was married to J. Sterling Morton by the Rev. Joshua Cooke, minister of the Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian church of that city. The young husband was her senior about a year; he had been educated at the University of Michigan, and Union College. He inclined to adopt journalism as his profession. On the day of their marriage the young pair bade adieu to the homes of their youth and turned their faces westward, to make for themselves a home in Nebraska. It was a new land. Six months had not passed since the Indians had ceded to the United States their title to this territory. Few pioneers had penetrated its borders. It was an absolutely unoccupied and vacant country.

There was a certain romance in this adventure. They gave up homes that had been made for them and the ministries which had there waited on them, the culture and elegances to which they were wont, the indulgences and pleasures of cities and of competence, for a new land where even grain for food was yet to be sown, houses to be built, and the first foundations of society to be laid. They came in a spirit of adventure, to do for themselves what their fathers had done before them, to begin their lives with the life of a new community, to

impress themselves on its institutions, and become a part of that great moral and political establishment which should fill these regions with a consistent, organized, and beneficent society. It was the same large spirit which from the earliest history of men has driven them always westward from the homes of their childhood to new countries, where they should plant new seats and establish a new civilization.

This young woman, vigorous with the nature which she inherited from a stalwart ancestry, brave, resolute, self-reliant, joined her young husband in this work, and bore her part in it with a heart never for a moment doubtful of the issue. The sequel shows that she was of the right stuff for the task, and that reward was equal to the effort and the sacrifice.

How far their new home was from the place of their childhood may be seen by tracing their journey, and the modes of their travel. They went by rail from Chicago to Alton on the Mississippi river, thence to St. Louis on that river by steamer, from St. Louis up the Missouri to St. Joseph by steamboat, and from there to Council Bluffs by stage. The whole distance occupied seven full days and nights of hard, tedious riding.

Early in November, 1854, Mrs. Morton was settled with her husband in Bellevue. Bellevue was the initial point of settlement in the new territory. For many years before, Col. Peter A. Sarpy, representative of the American Fur Company, had there a trading post, at which many treaties between the government and the Indians were negotiated and executed. Here, too, was the extensive mission of the Presbyterian church to the Omahas, under the charge of the Rev. William Hamilton. The governor of the territory, Hon. Francis Burt, had established himself at Bellevue, and it was expected that it would be made the capital of the new territory.

The home of the young pioneer was a log cabin of two rooms; it was upon the bluff about a mile below where the depot of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company now stands, and where the Missouri sweeps by in a wide and easy curve. In the mild, sunny fall of the year, the spot was one of beauty. The valley, dressed in the dull russet of the season, stretched many miles away, the view was met to the east by rugged bluffs far beyond the river on the Iowa side, and by gentle, soft hills on the west, while up and down the river—its current not turbid to the view, but silvered

in the distance—ran on its quiet course through miles and miles of the sleepy valley. Below the bluff on which the cabin stood, all that remained of the tribe of the Omahas had their tepees, and were the nearest neighbors of the new comers.

It was a strange experience for the young wife, she was almost alone. In the little hamlet the only other women were the wives of the Hon. Fenner Ferguson, the Rev. William Hamilton, Mr. Tozier, Mr. Israel Bennett, and perhaps one or two others whose names cannot be recalled. With her own hands she cooked such hard fare as could be had, and performed all the other offices of the little home. But there was no sigh for the good things left behind; no contrasting the hard present with the pleasant past. She looked with careful and abiding hope and faith to the future, always seeing in it honor and abundance and happiness for her and for him to whom she had given herself. There came often to them others who had entered on the same life, to claim their hospitality and their cheer, and a hearty welcome and brave words were given out of a generous and sympathizing heart. Many of these guests are gone, but some remain who recall with peculiar pleasure the humble home, the young wife, the cheerful, merry words, the welcome, and the generous hospitality.

In a few weeks after his arrival in the territory, Governor Burt died. The Hon. Thomas B. Cumming, the secretary, succeeded to the executive, and convened the first legislature at Omaha, where the capital was permanently fixed.

This dampened the hopes of Bellevue, and in April, 1855, Mr. Morton and his wife removed to Nebraska City. He "claimed" the tract of land near that city where they were always afterward to live, and in June they began to build the home which is known as Arbor Lodge.

Here now began in truth the real work of life, the making of a home in which should dwell not only herself, of whom she took the least account, but her husband and the children who should be given them—in which should dwell, besides, the undoubting affections of husband and wife, the kindly charities of generous souls, the woman's ministries for all within the household, and the reverend, constant, and faithful obedience of God's holy will and commandments.

The place was the naked prairie, except where a little stream with wooded banks divided the field in two. The strong, heavy grass

formed a tough sod which had never been broken. No sign of the white man's abode or steps was anywhere to be seen; it was an utter solitude, save as the bright sun shone through the clear, dry air down upon the green grass ever waving in the continual wind. The young people together marked the space for the house, a slight elevation, from which could be seen the wide valley and the distant hill on which Kearney was afterward built. The house was a long one-story building, with ample porch in front. Its rooms were, for the country and the time, large, and all its parts betokened comfort and hospitality. It was the good beginning of a home. The wife entered most heartily into the work of reclaiming from its wild nature the land about, joining to her husband's her own taste in laying off roads and lanes, and planting trees, and shrubs, and hedges. The tough sod was broken and sown; fences were built and avenues of trees were marked and planted. The work went on year by year; the soil became soft and tractable under abundant culture. The orchards of all fruits of this climate were planted, a few acres at first, more and more every year; barns, stables, sheds, and cribs for grain were built. The animals of the farm of the best blood were bought and bred and reared. Flowers and flowering shrubs, and vines and evergreens in great abundance, attested the woman's presence; time lent its aid, and the whole, along with the mistress and the family, trees of ornament and fruit, hedges and vines and flowers, under her nursing oversight, grew, until Arbor Lodge, with its more than seventy acres of orchard of every kind of fruit and all its other acres rich and mellow, and rejoicing in the good culture it had received, became a very bower, well described by the name it bore.

It was not, of course, all her work, but it was all work done under her inspiration. She knew every tree and shrub and vine, and of each had some sweet memory, and many were called by names given by her or her boys in token of some sweet association. There was the little conifer brought by her own hand from the mountains and guarded now by a stone, marked with an inscription none can read without a tear. There was the apple tree of special favor, whose fruit she most enjoyed, and known as "Mother's Tree," and so it was all about. The place is now, to those who loved her most, all alive in every spot with memories of her—her spirit as it formed and guided and nourished seems now to dwell in every thing.



A few years ago the house, which had shared the constant growth, room being added to room as there was need, was too straightened for the family, and was unequal to the taste and wishes of its mistress. The faithfulness and real poetry of the dwellers in it now showed themselves. The house was not abandoned or cast away and a new one built. The very timbers and frame and structure of the old one were sacred. Whatever greater elegance might be had in a new house, it could never have the far higher grace of association, and so it was kept, built upon and rebuilt, and there it stands to-day, an ample, handsome, delightful mansion, but still the house in which this gentleman and lady began their life and have reared their children.

It is within the renovated, enlarged, and rebuilt house that Mrs. Morton is most seen. Music of the best and highest order always sounded through this home, and there stands the piano which shall never more under her skilled fingers sing for us songs without words. Upon it is the cover those same fingers embroidered; and so clothed are table, chair, and sofa in every room. Paintings of decided merit, irrespective of the painter's name, are on the walls, some her own work and some her choice. Bric-a-brac, some collected, and much more decorated or made by her, are everywhere. The whole house seems written all over, in every place, with the sacred words, "wife and mother," for all was done by her for her husband and for her sons. What a contrast was Arbor Lodge when her eyes closed on it forever and when first they saw it, and what a life to have wrought that work!

Her first boy, Joy, was born in Detroit, on the 27th of September, 1855. Then, on the 22d of May, 1857, came Paul, in the same place; Mark was born on the 22d of November, 1858, at the hotel in Omaha then known as the Herndon house, now occupied by the Union Pacific Railroad Company for its general offices; and Carl was born at Arbor Lodge, on the 18th of February, 1865.

Arbor Lodge is Mrs. Morton's memorial, but she lives truly in these sons. As she in her youth had been trained and educated with care, affection, a discreet indulgence, and well tempered severity, so she reared her children. What most she taught them was truth, sincerity, fidelity, respect for men and reverence for God. Much she did by precept, but far more by constant and intimate companionship.

She entered heartily into all that interested them. Together they often went out, with generous provision for the hunger which was sure to come, and spent the whole day in the fields and woods, gathering nuts, lichens, ferns, shrubs, and flowers, always carefully disposing of the treasures they brought home, so that they might afterward be put to use. And often, too, they passed the whole day together in the house enjoying music, games, reading, and the telling of tales full of humour and fun. In the midst of all she was the heedful mother, correcting faults and approving what was good, and also a sister, putting no restraint on any of them, and sharing every feeling, impulse, and emotion. The mother was in this woman. How her eyes were gladdened by what she saw! She held her early marriage to be the happy circumstance of her life, and she rejoiced that the same good fortune came to Joy and Paul; and when they brought their wives to her she took them to her heart as daughters. Those were the radiant days of her life.

She was too good a woman ever to forget that when she was a little motherless child a kind friend had taken her home and reared her with judicious care. She was always remembering this when she saw another such an one, and her heart went out to it with especial tenderness and sympathy. Her friend, Mrs. Chandler, died very suddenly, leaving behind a little one who needed a home and a mother's care. She took the little Dela to Arbor Lodge to rear and train and make a woman of, such as others had made her. With what love and tenderness and patience and judicious care she did her duty to the child, and with what anxiety she gave up the charge when she gave up all the rest of the world, they only know who saw it all.

In 1858 Mr. Morton was appointed secretary of the territory, and much of his term he was acting governor. The duties of his office called him to the capital, and he had his family with him. Omaha at that time was a town of perhaps 2,000 inhabitants. There were enough to make a pleasant society, but not so many but all could know one another. During her residence there Mrs. Morton entered very heartily into social life. She was genial, affable, charitable. She was at this time a handsome lady; perhaps she never appeared to better advantage than she did then. Many who shared that early life remember her as she was then with especial pleasure. But it was in the society of her own home that she held the largest place. In

the earliest days, when hospitality was a necessity, she learned, if ever she needed to learn, to exercise it generously and graciously. Her door was always open to all comers. The poor were never sent empty away, and her friends shared whatever she had with an unlimited freedom. Arbor Lodge was always a gay house. It was a place of dancing, and games, and jollity. The young especially resorted thither with an assurance of welcome and pleasure.

And there was another charity which this good lady exercised, the care and help of the poor. Those whom others did not care for she took as her own charge. There was a poor half-breed Indian boy who had been put out at the school near Nebraska City by his father, but who had been neglected by him; he drifted away from good influences, and at last committed some trifling offense for which he was lodged in jail. The story accidentally came to Mrs. Morton's ears, and at once she set about securing his release and providing him with proper care. She asked no aid in the task but went about from man to man all over the town, getting their signatures to a petition for his discharge, and having gained that she collected money to send him to his father, seven hundred miles away. When a neighbor told her that her servant, a poor motherless girl, aspired to be a teacher, Mrs. Morton adopted the case as especially her own charge. She inspired the girl to educate herself and then to secure a place in the country to teach. When she was suffering excruciating pains in her last sickness she heard that there was a vacancy in the high school in Nebraska City which she thought the young teacher could fill. Dr. E. W. Whitten, her attending physician, was a member of the board of education, and she besought his aid; he discouraged the effort because there were many other applicants who had friends of influence, but Mrs. Morton was not to be put off; indeed in the very fact that the girl was friendless she found reason for her appointment. The evening came on which the election by the board was to be had; the doctor was attending her, but suffering greatly as she was, she refused his services and charged him to hasten to the meeting and tell the members that this was a poor, friendless girl who had educated herself and was worthy of the place; that she would go to them in person and beg the appointment but she was too ill to do so; and from her sick bed she asked this favor of them. When the doctor came the next morning, heedless of her own condition, her first question was, "What

did the board do?" When told that they had unanimously granted her request the expression of gratitude and happiness on her worn and emaciated features told of the self-forgetful, generous nature of the invalid. Her suffering only made her more heedful of others; her approach to the gates of Paradise made her spirit more than ever loving and charitable.

Mrs. Morton was not a highly intellectual lady, she made no such pretensions. Her numerous occupations and her imperious duties in so many directions did not leave her time or strength or inclination for studies and labors of a severe character; but she was thoroughly intelligent. She kept well up with current literature and with passing events. She was well informed upon the topics which occupied public attention, political, social, and religious, and she discussed them with discrimination and temperance.

The relations of Mr. and Mrs. Morton were singularly happy. It was in their childhood that they plighted their affections, and in their early maturity that they were married. There was too much force and vigor in the wife for the man to outgrow or weary of her. With no separate wish or ambition, but with common purposes and common views of life, its just modes and aims, they were each the complement of the other, and the two together were one. To her husband was the admirable man; she shared his trials, his hopes, his disappointments, his ambitions, his growth, and rejoiced to be in all good and ill fortune his true helpmeet. To be his wife in all service and affection was her pride and joy. This was the peculiar felicity of a very happy life. And now, just as the hard work was done and the full reward was at hand, the end came. The beautiful house, the perfected homestead, rooms and decorations, trees, flowers, walks, and drives, animals, servants, and friends and sons and husband; memories, charities, friendships, affections, and the dear light of day, just when they were most cherished, were all to be given up. She looked back on all these blessings, not with repining but with devout gratitude to the Giver of all good gifts. She looked forward with the same courage and faith which she bore through life. She always had a perfect contentment with what was given her; she had realized all she aspired to. In her last illness she said: "My sons have never made my hair gray. Very few women have lived so long and so happily in a human home and shed so few

tears as I." It was her habit during her husband's absence to keep a daily diary; the last entry is dated February 2, 1882. She writes: "I am suffering great pain to-day, but perhaps when the trees blossom again and the birds begin to sing I shall be better, but when I look around me and see how comfortable a home I have, I feel very thankful, and had almost as lief be sick as not."

Mrs. Morton, by a fall on the third day of July, 1880, injured her knee. She gave it little attention, and shortly afterward had another misfortune with it. She suffered great pain. The best medical attendance failed to relieve her and the disease progressed rapidly; during her illness prayers were read for her at every service in St. Mary's church, where she was a communicant, the knowledge of which was a great comfort and help to her. Her rector visited her frequently and prayed with her and for her, and administered the help and consolations of the church. A few days before her death she called her husband and her eldest son to her bedside and said: "Let me read the prayer for the sick." She wished to read it herself to express her prayer to her heavenly Father with more fervency. She read it with clear and decided but pathetic and pleading tones, and then committed to him the issue.

The last day was the 29th day of June; she lay in the library, the windows of which open to the east and receive the first light of the coming day. The time was sunrise; the windows were open, and the first warm breath of the morning came in fresh and sweet from the fields and flowers; her breath was drawn with the sound of a lullaby as though hushing a babe to sleep, the same note she had used when quieting her infant children. Joy said: "Paul and Mark cannot get here, they will never see you in life again; won't you send them a kiss by me?" She kissed him twice distinctly and perfectly. It was the last conscious act to send a kiss to each absent son. She closed her eyes and the heart was still. The night was over and the day had come.

The late afternoon of the second day following Mrs. Morton's death, Arbor Lodge was the scene of a striking event which was in harmony with her life. By common consent all business in Nebraska City was suspended and the pall of mourning was upon all the silent and empty streets. About four o'clock the people of the town, and multitudes from every part of the county, and representatives from

all portions of the state took their way toward the desolate home. There were all classes in the company, but most to be observed was the throng of the poor and of those not largely blessed with wordly means. The number of them was very great, and the sorrow of face and tone and manner spoke of a personal bereavement. They to whose wants had for so many years been given kindly and untiring ministries, they whose misfortunes and sorrows had been cheered by words and acts of thoughtful sympathy, they who had seen this life of tender, vigilant, and unselfish service for others, all came to this mansion with their other fellow citizens and fellow mourners for the one common purpose.

It was a June afternoon, and, save in the hearts of the throng of people, all was peaceful and sweet. Her own four sons, Joy, Paul, Mark, and Carl, carried her forth, assisted by four of the near friends of the family. With the setting of the sun she was laid to rest in the cemetery, Wyuka, and the grave was strewn with flowers by the hands of her own boys.

The little field thus consecrated by the sacred dust now deposited in it has been fitly marked. A shaft, twenty feet high and three feet in diameter at the base, has been erected in the midst. It is in the form of a trunk of a forest tree, which has been riven and broken at the top. At its base fitly disposed emblems of the life now ended—a sheet with the music and words "Rock of Ages," the needles and materials of embroidery, the painter's palette, pencils, and brushes, graceful ferns and large lichens, a vase upon its side with broken lilies, and ivy twining to the top. One branch hangs, symbolizing the broken life. Upon the opposite side is the cavity of a decayed knot, in which are three fledglings which have left the nest, while on the top of the trunk, looking down upon her little ones, is the anxious mother, and one other, the youngest of the brood under her wing. The little field is protected by a fence of stone, the base being a perfect resemblance of rows of stumps of trees cut to a uniform height, upon which are logs lying horizontally as they are laid in a log house.

The whole is symbolic of a life in the new country, in familiar sympathy with nature in her tenderest moods.

The inscription is: Caroline, wife of J. Sterling Morton. Died at Arbor Lodge, June 29, 1881, aged 47 years. She was the mother of Joy, Paul, Mark, and Carl Morton.