

THE RALPH EMERSON FLOWER RESERVE OF ROCKFORD COLLEGE

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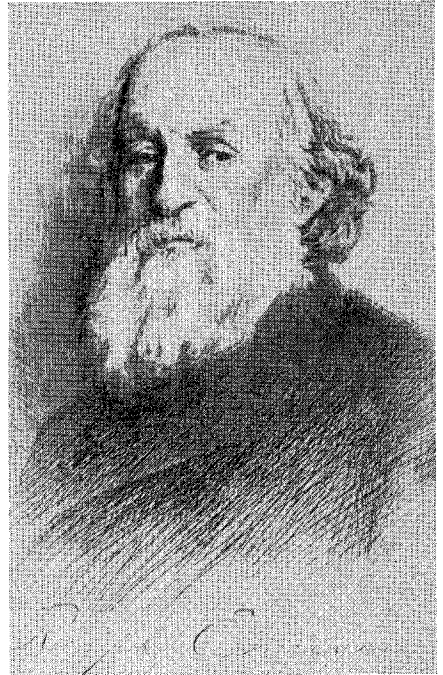
The Ralph Emerson Flower Reserve was presented to Rockford College by Dora Emerson Wheeler (Mrs. William Morton Wheeler) in memory of her father, Ralph Emerson, May 3, 1947, at the Rockford College Centennial Convocation. On May 6, 1951, the dedication ceremony took place near a boulder on which there is now a bronze plate bearing the following inscription:

RALPH EMERSON FLOWER
PRESERVE

May 3, 1831-August 19, 1914
given in his memory to
Rockford College
by his daughter
Dora Emerson Wheeler
May 3, 1947

President Mary Ashby Cheek, members of the Board of Trustees, faculty, students, members of the Emerson family, and friends were present for the ceremony. Adaline Wheeler, Mrs. Wheeler's daughter, was the principal speaker.

Most of the tract, which is a little over five acres, is heavily wooded with many beautiful old trees and is an excellent example of the original oak-hickory forest. It is situated on the Rock River near its confluence with the Kishwaukee River, south of Rockford. Mrs. Wheeler designated that the reserve was to be used by the faculty and students of the college botany department for the study of the flora of the Rock River region and the advancement of knowledge in this field. In this way



she provided an outdoor laboratory for the students in the plant sciences. Following Mrs. Wheeler's wish that the whole college may enjoy the reserve a picnic is held there on May 3, the anniversary of Mr. Emerson's birth. It is at that time that the spring flowers are abundant and make an unusually fine display

Ralph Emerson came to Beloit, Wisconsin, from Andover, Massachusetts, at the age of 20, and a year later moved to Rockford. His brother Joseph taught at Beloit College for many years. Although he made his

great contribution in the industrial field and to its early development in Rockford, he was a versatile individual. He was long interested in education, which was quite natural as he came from a long line of clergymen and teachers.

He was always interested in the study of nature. His birthday was always celebrated by the family in some outdoor spot, and he spent many hours of his later life on this particular property. This love of nature was developed in him at an early age, for he wrote in a brief autobiography how he spent a great deal of time as a boy in Andover, Massachusetts, observing the country near his home. He tells us that "there was not a rock of any size, a berry patch, a little nook where any peculiar flower grew or any strange tree or bush for miles around with which I was not familiar. I could find flowers among those hills . . . swamps that probably not one in three hundred of the present inhabitants dreams exists there."

The boulder used as a marker for the reserve has an interesting history. Although Emerson fully appreciated the beauties of his adopted Illinois, he sometimes became homesick for New England. Finally he had two carloads of boulders sent from New England. One of these much-travelled boulders is now the marker for the preserve.

This love of the natural world he instilled in his children, and they in their varied ways have shown their

appreciation of his teaching. To Mrs. Wheeler, with her childhood recollection of the glories of the wild flowers around Rockford and the May third family picnics in the lovely Illinois countryside, this memorial to her father seemed most fitting. The idea of establishing a wild flower reserve met with the hearty approval of Mrs. Wheeler's nephew and niece, Mr. and Mrs. Edward C. Hinchliff, without whose wholehearted cooperation it would not have been possible to establish this memorial.

As Miss Wheeler said at the time of the dedication, "This project is primarily for the serious study of botany . . . the possible touchstone to research and work in this line, together with an appreciation of existing plant material. Secondly, it is a means, in a small but real sense of the necessity of conservation in one of its more appealing and easily comprehended aspects by everyone who has any conception of beauty and fitness. Thirdly, this reserve can serve those who need to rebuild these inner springs of energy and well-being with fine peace and solace which nature in some of its varied manifestations can give to those who seek and find in her the means to carry on in these troubled times. Ralph Emerson saw not only the beauty in nature, but he also drew from this association the strength to go ever forward and carry the heavy responsibilities which he bore so ably throughout a long and arduous life."