

Ellen Browning Scripps Papers
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MEMOIRS OF ELLEN BROWNING SCRIPPS

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

by
Mary Bennett Ritter

Berkeley, California, April 5, 1937

Memoirs of Ellen Browning Scripps.

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1933

One morning in October brought me a letter from Mr. J.C. H Harper, editor of this memoir, asking me to assist in a memorial to Miss Scripps, for the reason, he said, that I had been more closely associated with her than anyone else in her work for women and girls. He referred especially to her interests in club work as an educational factor in their lives.

By a strange coincidence-- all coincidences are strange, are they not?-- at the moment of receiving his letter I was writing of Miss Scripps in a book of my own. I shall therefore take the liberty of quoting freely from that book since it covers the same ground in several matters.

"Never shall I forget my first glimpse of Ellen Browning Scripps. It was on our ^{original} survey trip to La Jolla. We went out late on Saturday afternoon to spend the week-end in order that Mr. Ritter might explore the shore in that region. On the little rattling train I noticed a small, inconspicuous, plainly-dressed woman who attracted my attention because she was so different from the other passengers. I studied her as she sat diagonally across the car and a little in front of our seat. I decided she had the plainest face I had ever seen, yet it was attractive.

We stopped at a station. She looked out of the window and quickly rose, went to the door and waved to three small children seated in a buckboard drawn by an old white horse and driven by an aged negro. As she waved and smiled at the children whom I later learned were those of her brother Fred, her face lit up with such a sweet expression that I exclaimed, 'Oh, how beautiful she is!' The plain features were illumined by a spirit of such grandeur that they were transformed.

This was a fitting introduction to the character of the woman who became a most intimate friend and associate for a quarter of a century."

This incident was characteristic of Miss Scripps. At least it indicated three of her strongest characteristics: First, the habit of sitting in deep meditation instead of chattering with those about her-- not day-dreaming, but thinking. And how few people really think. Secondly, the plainness of her dress indicating her habit of self-denial which amounted almost to self-immolation. She used to say to me often, 'No one needs less to eat or to wear than I.' And it was true. She was abstemious in eating and simple in dress. The hat she wore when I first saw her was of several vintages past and she wore the same hat at least for two or three years longer.

The third characteristic evinced in my first glimpse of Miss Scripps was her devotion to her family. The love which illumined her face as she greeted those babies welled up from the depths of a mother's heart. This love for her family was not for

little children alone but for all the generations of the tripartite family groups.

A striking illustration of her devotion to family was shown by her attitude toward the oldest member of the group, a half-sister, the child of her father's first marriage. He was married three times. Ellen was one of six children of the second wife after whose death the father brought his family from the heart of London where they had lived, to the small town of Rushville, Illinois in the United States. Ellen was then four and a half years old.

To understand Ellen Scripps and her life work one must have a bit of her background from earliest years. She was of pure English heritage. Her father's third wife was an American woman who bore him ⁵four children. When the third child, Virginia, was born, the mother was an invalid and the baby was placed in Ellen's care. Three years later the last child, Edward Willis was laid in her arms at birth, to be cared for as a child of her own. Thus, at the age of eighteen she virtually became the mother of these two children.

Virginia lived her entire life with her sister, but the companionship which existed between Ellen and her brother Edward, who became the great editor, existed until his death. The relationship was not only unique but was a factor of vital importance in the lives of both and neither can be understood without an understanding of the other.

Caring for the baby, Edward during his infancy, he tells that when he was four years old she Ellen gathered all the children around her knees and taught them all-- taught him his letters and to read.

Later she undertook the care of her eldest invalid sister,

a widow with two small children who lacked sufficient means of support. Ellen not only did the housework but taught school to aid in caring for the family. Edward was a pupil in this school and continued his education during his early years under his sister, who added to her labors by writing for a newspaper, The Detroit News, conducted by her brother James.

In spite of her many duties Ellen attended Knox College, Illinois, one of the first to admit women students, from which she graduated at the age of twenty-three. It was she who instilled the idea of college training into Edward's mind. To earn money for it he took a position as "printer's devil" and newsboy with the Detroit News, his brother James' paper. This was after the Civil War, and imbued with the war-time spirit, both he and Ellen became newspaper writers and later he established a small paper of his own, the Cleveland Press, the forerunner of the Scripps-McRae chain of newspapers over the United States, and the source of their fortune. This was no get-rich-quick fortune, but one built up by unusual brain power, business acumen, vision and hard work.

During all her newspaper life Miss Scripps wrote a column on Affairs of the Day the World Over and as time has proved this was the beginning of "feature writing".

Thus Ellen Scripps was the original columnist and "feature writer". She was always a partner and business associate of her brother whose genius she recognized when others considered him only a queer boy and later a freak.

Edward was a born experimentalist-- as much as any explorer or laboratory scientist. He was also a believer in the common man, and it was for this class that he established his penny papers. But whenever his luxurious imagination prodded him into dubious

projects he carried them, as he did everything to his sister Ellen for her opinion; and he listened to her advice. Some of his business experiments cost him heavily in actual money. So he was keenly alive to the need of a check-up on his tendencies. "Sister Ellen" was his main reliance in this. He used to tell Mr. Ritter that when he got some interesting but rather dubious project into his head he always "took it to Ellen", before coming to a final decision. "And" he would say with a peculiar little twist of his head, "if she said, 'now Ed you better think twice on this,'. I was pretty sure to think twice and usually to decide I had better alter my plans considerably or give them up altogether.

Thus for thirty years this close intimacy of sister and brother, business partners and intellectual companions, continued unbroken.

When Edward's health failed Ellen went with him to Europe where they spent a year and a half travelling and studying languages and literature. She was not with him however at the time of his death which occurred on March 17, 1926 off the west coast of Africa during a two year cruise on his yacht. This was seven and a half years before his sister ended her career of building and giving, which he had instigated.

Several years after the European trip she came with her sister Edward and his ^{young} ~~little~~ family to San Diego, California, where they invested in the great Miramar ranch.

As the newspaper ventures increased in numbers and in profit Miss Scripps brought the family of her invalid sister to San Diego and provided a home for them. She later built a ^{home} ~~home~~ for herself in La Jolla in order to make a home for another invalid sister who died of tuberculosis, and for her youngest sister Virginia. But through

all these years, regardless of other pressing duties, the close companionship with her brother Edward was paramount. She had lived at Min~~im~~ar several years, but after establishing her home in La Jolla he visited her regularly every week, "to talk things over with Ellen" he said.

The years sped by and when we went to San Diego for the purpose of establishing a biological laboratory in that vicinity we met the Scripps family for the first time. Miss Ellen Scripps was then a woman of seventy and her brother, Edward, already recognized as a power in the newspaper world, was ~~fifty~~^{near up}-two years of age.

The friendship which ~~arose~~^{grew up} ~~developed~~ between Miss Scripps and my husband and me (Dr. Ritter, a professor of zoology at the University of California) though based on different grounds, was inspired not alone by personal congeniality but also by mutual interests. Our first common interest was the development of the Marine Laboratory on the La Jolla beach, a temporary structure. In ~~this~~ enterprise Miss Scripps was the chief contributor and her interest in the work grew steadily until its completion in the summer of 1905 when the laboratory was first occupied. Until 1908 it was used mainly by summer groups of University professors and students.

In 1906 my husband and I planned a trip to Japan, intending to continue the journey around the world. The winter had been spent in La Jolla for the purpose of developing all-the-year-round observations, and a full time assistant had been employed.

During this winter's residence my acquaintance with Miss Scripps had become more intimate, partly because of my having joined the

La Jolla Women's Club in which Miss Scripps was deeply interested as she considered it a worthy factor in community development.

This brief residence in La Jolla was but the first installment of a year's leave of absence ~~from~~ the University ~~for the~~ ~~de~~ further advancement of the plans of the biological sea-shore laboratory, and for a trip to the Orient.

The time spent in Japan was to be given to studying marine laboratories there. Miss Scripps decided to go with us and was full of enthusiasm over the prospective trip until the sudden death of her oldest sister's daughter changed her plans.

It required but little thought on Miss Scripps' part to conclude that it was her duty to remain near her sorrowing and helpless sister for whom she had provided a home and nurses for many years. No arguments could persuade her to relinquish her plan to remain ~~near~~ her sister. It was decided later on that the ~~younger~~ sister, Virginia, would accompany us to Japan. As we were to spend a month in Honolulu with friends, we sailed for the islands in January, 1906, where Miss Virginia joined us in February. She brought a letter from her sister from which I quote evidences of genuine pleasure in her self-sacrifice and devotion to two members of her family suffering from illness.

"This is wishing you a continuation of perfect sailing for the rest of your trip; and a glorious time on terra firma. . . I shall try to follow at your heels when you land again. If only I were spiritualized enough to go ~~off~~ ^{on} a little journey in my astral body!

"Of course I shall think of you often; but only with delight for you, not with regret for myself. I am enough of a believer in the eternal Present not to deplore the "might-have-been." I couldn't make people understand why I had to abandon the trip and so I did not try. Their "obtuseness" surprised me. But perhaps it is only because of a different mental structure. It wasn't a case of "ought" with me at all-- simply a case of "must". It may be there were other leading s that I did not see at first, but begin to see now. You know my brother ^(William) is with me and I am conscious that it may be the last time we are together. I cannot tell you what a joy it is to me to have him here as he is--

happy and content; so thoroughly enjoying everything. It seems a fitting termination to so active a life as his has been. I had feared he would have chafed under the forced inaction and the simple quiet life. But he has taken to it so kindly and so appreciatively and seems so happy in it, that it more than compensates me for any loss I have had.

"But we won't talk of 'loss' as though there were or could be such a thing. Everything must be gain, though we don't always know it."

It was not until 1909 that we moved permanently to La Jolla in order to oversee the construction of the first building on the new sight acquired for a permanent laboratory. To Mr. Scripps belongs the credit of what at first seemed an extravagant solution to the question of a location for the ^{Biological} Marine Institution. For a nominal sum a pueblo of one hundred and seventy acres was secured two miles north of La Jolla, with an ocean frontage of one-half mile.

Miss Scripps erected this first building in memory of her brother George, who had been a lover of shore life.

Both Miss Scripps and Mr. Edward Scripps were becoming more and more interested in the Biological Institution and a very close friendship was growing up between Mr. Scripps and Mr. Ritter. While the laboratory building was under consideration he had said to Mr. Ritter, "Ritter, I want you to get my sister Ellen so deeply interested in this project that she will forget her age. She is seventyone and our family drop off at seventy-one or seventy-two years, and I know Ellen is thinking about it. I want her to become so absorbed in something that the next two or three

years will pass before she realizes it. So I am going to urge her to build this laboratory in memory of our brother George." The[^]he added, "She was so poor in her younger days that she has never been able to feel rich. Now I want her to give away all her surplus money instead of leaving it for me to attend to. I know she has made me executor of her estate and I want her to make her benefactions during her own life."

By persuading Miss Scripps to build the Memorial Laboratory for George^{H.} Scripps who had had scientific tastes, he had hurled her into an orgy of building and giving that caused her ^{him} brother to utter words of warning later, all to no effect. She had truly learned the joy of giving and the pleasure of building seemed to fascinate her. She was still building Scripps College, one of the group of Claremont Colleges, when she passed away in August 1932 at the age of ninety-six .

But this orgy of building as I have called it was probably not so naive as it seems. About this time the George H. Scripps estate had been settled and her share in the Scripps newspapers was more than doubled. This estate Miss Scripps and her brother looked upon as a trust to be used for the good of humanity.

Previous to becoming interested in the Biological Institution Miss Scripps had been generous beyond measure to the needy members of her own family and to various organizations listed in her large donations, but she ^{had} never erected a building for public use and seeing one take permanent form seemed to fascinate her and the local library, the ^{Women's} local club house,

play grounds and hospital followed in rapid succession, the building of the laboratory.

Miss Scripps was interested not only in education per se, but in civic, state and national welfare. She had always been deeply interested in the advancement of women and had been a greater worker in securing their enfranchisement. She considered, with many others, that the womens' clubs were a means of education for the ordinary woman in all such matters. The ^{Womens'} local club which she had had a part in building up was faring ^{badly} hardly those days. It had for years occupied a rented building and when this was sold no suitable place could be found as a substitute. Miss Scripps therefore arranged a room in her own house for the meetings temporarily.

But to return to the building of the laboratory at La Jolla. It fell to my lot to oversee the erection of this building as the visits of the San Diego architect were less frequent than could have been wished for. Possibly it was this task that led Miss Scripps later to impose on me another one with this same architect.

omit here.
Miss Scripps was more interested in the civic rather than in the commercial advancement of the community. She subscribed to all denominations of churches equally although she was not a member of any.

One day she sent for me and told me she had made up her mind to build a club house if I would undertake to oversee it. Her idea was to erect a simple cottage-like building to cost about seven or eight thousand dollars. Before the architect had finished his plans, however, we were launched upon the construction of a forty thousand dollar concrete building. The architect was the one who had built our laboratory, *Temple* (the La Jolla library, a gift of Miss Scripps to the town, and the Bishop's School to which she had been a liberal contributor. Knowing of further day-dreams of the town's benefactress, he insisted that the club house be of concrete, in keeping with the other buildings then in existence as well as those to come.

The club house was many months in process of construction. Miss Scripps gave an extra five thousand dollars for the furnishings, which included not only seats, tea-tables, dishes and an entire culinary outfit, but also beautiful hangings for windows and stage and several Oriental rugs.

To support this expensive club house and its gardens was no easy task for the small village club. Annual dues had to be

raised from one to five dollars and an initiation fee charged.

At the same time it was necessary to treble the membership to have even a working basis.

Miss Scripps was extremely desirous that the club should be democratic and open to all women in the community wishing to participate in its activities. For this purpose she offered twenty-five memberships to residents of the village, hoping in this way to induce women unable to afford the initial expense, to join the club.

In addition, pay entertainments of all sorts-- lectures and concerts were given. Outside as well as home talent was requisitioned. A pageant representing twenty-six Shakespearean plays was given by the club; A Greek play, Agamemnon, was also staged. This meant hard work for all of us and all took part, even Miss Scripps who was leader in the Greek chorus as well as a character in the Shakespearean pageant. The amount of money raised for war beneficences by such club efforts was outstanding.

Having the only good hall in the village, we counted on rentals as one source of revenue. But, later, another day-dream of the woman who had learned to give, materialized, conferring a great blessing on the community but largely reducing the club's source of revenue. This occurred when Miss Scripps bought two blocks of properties opposite the club house, had sixteen houses moved off onto vacant lots and gave the City of San Diego carte blanche to build playgrounds for La Jolla, with a community house for free gatherings of all sorts. This community house, the playgrounds and tennis courts are used daily by young and old.

Miss Scripps was more interested in the civic than in the commercial advancement of the community. She subscribed to all

denominations of churches equally though she was not a member of any. This did not indicate that she was irreligious. On the contrary, she was a deeply religious woman, but not orthodox.

To quote from another memoir: "In her early life Miss Scripps was a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Rushville; of the Congregational Church in Galesburg while in college and, on her return to Rushville, of the Presbyterian Church from which she withdrew in 1879, probably because of heresy trials among the Presbyterians and the fact that the church then frowned on women's participation in its public services. She never thereafter united with any denomination, although she was a regular contributor to all churches in La Jolla, assisted in building their houses of worship and was a diligent student of the Bible."

Miss Scripps was deeply interested in education and made large contributions to her Alma Mater and other women's colleges. This interest culminated in the building of Scripps College, one of the group of Claremont Colleges.

Regarding the training of children she once remarked, "If older people only realized how children feel! As a child I hated to be forced to do anything. . . I hated the word 'must'. If my elders could only have understood me better, things might have been different."

This characteristic of Miss Scripps-- that she could not be forced or dominated-- remained a characteristic during her entire life. Yet a more tolerant woman I never knew. She had a wonderful faculty of seeing both sides of a proposition and keen she was in her queries as to the other side of any proposition brought to her attention, whether it was an appeal for financial

aid, a matter of civic advancement or of world interest.

During all her years of club work, from the age of seventy to eighty-five, Miss Scripps' experience in newspaper writing resulted in a benefit to us in many able papers which she prepared not for our club alone but for the conventions of county or district federations, held thereabout.

To attend the meetings of these various federations, which Miss Scripps and I did together, in many parts of the county, required long automobile trips. This was during the transition period from the horse and carriage stage to that of the common use of the automobile. There were already many machines in La Jolla but Miss Scripps was not one of the early possessors.

The story of her first automobile illustrates well both her self denial and the relation between herself and her brother Edward, in whose family there was a car for each member. He had for a long time been desiring to give one to his sister also but she stubbornly refused to allow it, saying she did not need it. But as to this need her friends felt very differently. She was failing in health to a certain extent and was subject to attacks of vertigo which had caused several somewhat serious falls, once breaking her arm. One convention in Coronado required a journey of two hours by street car and boat, with four changes to reach the hotel.

I felt so strongly that these changes were unsafe for her

I spoke to her brother about it. He said he would send a car and driver to take her over. The driver would stop for ^{he} me and asked me to look out for her.

"As much as she will allow me to," I replied, "but you know her independence." Thus a car was at her command during the convention.

As time passed on I became more anxious about the danger of her going about on foot so resolved to 'take the bull by the horns', and one day I said to Mrs. Scripps: "Mr. Scripps still wants to give his sister an automobile does he not?" She replied that he did but that "Ellen" refused to have one so he had given up."

"Please tell him," I answered that I think she needs one very much and I should like to talk to him about it."

He came in the next day in that brusque and belligerent manner of his, greeting me with the words: "So you think I ought to give my sister an automobile, do you? Well, I've tried for years to give her one but she simply will not have it."

"I know that, Mr. Scripps," I replied, "but she must have it-- with a driver to take her everywhere she wants to go-- to help her in and out of the car. If she doesn't there will be a serious accident before long." Then I proceeded to tell him of several instances of near accidents due to her dizzy spells.

Mr. Scripps said he knew about those spells but asked what he could do about it when she wouldn't let him give her a car.

"Give her one anyway," I replied.

"You don't know my sister Ellen as I do," he said.

"You don't understand women as I do," I responded. "She not only needs but wants an automobile. She rides with me in my little old Buick. . . with Mrs. Park in her Ford. She gladly goes with Mr. Harper to Los Angeles in his Franklin, and her refusal to accept a car is due only to the fact that there is still a remnant of that self-immolation of which you have spoken many times. . . of her having been so poor as a girl that she cannot learn to feel rich. . . that she has sacrificed so much for others that she thinks an automobile would be self-indulgence. But I think it is a life-saving necessity," I added.

"So do I," he said, "and I've done everything I could to make her have one."

"But you've not gone at it in the right way," I answered.

"You have asked her to let you give her one."

"What else could I do?" he asked.

"Give it to her as you'd give a Christmas present."

"I don't give Christmas presents," he said.

"Well," I replied, "Christmas is too far off anyway. She must have that safe-guard sooner."

"What can I do?" he persisted. "Ellen would refuse it if I

She is not like other women; she cannot be forced; I know, for I've tried it. What can I do? Ellen would refuse it if I got it without her consent."

"Well, Mr. Scripps," I said, "Will you do this? When you go to see her tomorrow will you remark as you're leaving that you are going to send for an automobile for her, not giving her a chance to refuse?"

This was on Saturday.

On Monday he came in smiling broadly. "I've sent for it," was his greeting.

"Sent for what?" I countered.

"A car for Ellen," he answered.

"How did you manage it?" I asked.

"I followed your advice and, just as I was leaving, I remarked as if it were an after-thought; 'By the way Ellen, I'm going to send for an automobile for you.'"

"What did she reply?" I queried.

" 'Are you?' was all she said."

The large seven-passenger Pierce-Arrow which she used on all occasions for herself and her friends became also the carry-all for gay wedding parties as well as for bereaved families in a funeral cortege.

The wisdom of Mr. Scripps in dealing with his sister was demonstrated years later when she received her second automobile after a year of hospitalization in a plaster cast, as a result of her spirit of independence when she tried to cover her sleeping-porch-bed from an approaching rain storm instead of calling one of the ten men in the garden. She slipped and splintered her hip bone.

When she was able to drive with her nurse she slipped as she got into the big Pierce Arrow and broke her ankle.

While she was recovering from this accident, her attorney felt it was essential she should have a smaller and lower car, adjusted to her *needs*.

~~size~~ and needs. Knowing that she would object to such extravagance he ordered a Rolls-Royce with certain changes in the step and backseat to make it easier for her to get in and out. This "surprise" resulted in a cyclonic storm which the kindly-intentioned administrator and ^{the} chauffeur will never forget. She demonstrated that she did have a "mind and will of her own." But this is Mr. Harper's story.

Another incident decidedly contrasted with this one as to her economies. One day she told me she was in something of a quandary and wanted me to help her out. She had had a letter from a school mate whom she had not seen since they stood on the platform to receive their diplomas from Knox College fifty years before. ^{This classmate} She had written that she was coming to San Francisco with her grandchildren who were to attend the National Sunday School Convention and she wanted to ^{visit} ~~go to see~~ her old school friend. "Miss Scripps said, "I have no idea what sort of a person she is and I wish you would help me entertain her." This was one of the times when, being alone, she was doing her own work.

The friend arrived in a couple of weeks and proved to be a demure, housewifely grandmother of moderate means. One day she said to me: "I cannot understand Ellen's ideas of economy. ^{Here} she is doing her own housework with only a woman coming in once or twice a week for cleaning and yet out there in her garden-- a whole block ^{of land} I counted ten gardeners at work. I spoke to her about it," she continued. "I told her I thought that was very extravagant. It must cost more than a thousand dollars a month. 'Extravagant!' ~~she said~~ Miss Scripps exclaimed. (That

word was anathema to her, I knew.) "Well, you see," Ellen said, 'La Jolla has no park and I have all this space here. Hundreds of people walk through my garden every week. It is always open to the public and when I divide what it costs me by the number of people who enjoy it I think it is one of the most economical civic duties I could perform.'"

I laughed heartily. "You've hit the nail on the head," I remarked. "Miss Scripps' economies are all practiced on herself. Contributing to the welfare and happiness of others is not extravagance in her eyes."

As I write these amusing reminiscences of Miss Scripps' human-ness I have before me the beautiful tribute prepared for her one hundredth anniversary of her birth (October 18, 1836) , which describes the ^{very exceptional} ~~super-human~~ woman she was. With every word of the praise lavished upon her I heartily concur. . . she ^{was} ~~is~~ all she is depicted in these encomiums of the many people who knew of her generosities and her great benefactions. She was all that and more. Miss Scripps was a rare diamond, not only in ~~the~~ facet at which one looked first, but in her various facets that reflected light in many directions. Were there only the facet of a diamond. . . were she only the majestic super-woman, doling out of her abundance, interested only in benefactions and the general good she would be set off from the rest of us by this great superiority of character. But though she was remarkably firm and stable, she was also human-- very human. She would have been less loveable were she not. The very fact that she had 'a mind and a will of her own' which could not ^{readily be} ~~be~~ lightly

~~dominated~~
crossed made her a character more easily approached in one way and more to be deferred to in another. She was simplicity itself and always self-abasing. When consulted about anything she usually began her answer with, "But you know I am not one to pronounce upon such a subject," and then she would speak emphatically about her own inadequacy in such a naive way that I always felt like hugging her and often did.

So these illustrations of her human-ness are given not to detract from but to enhance her greatness and bring her more to the understanding of other struggling women for her life was a continuous struggle with conditions and personalities which moneyed wealth alone could not solve, but required a wealth of human qualities-- patience, long-suffering, kindness, ^{and} deep understanding of human nature. It was these qualities which enabled her to carry on. It was this sweet, humble, loving little woman whom I revere more than any one I ever knew. I feel deeply grateful that it was my privilege to be so intimately associated with her for so many years-- during the last quarter of her active life.