

Harvey Clelland DeMotte (1838-1904)

Harvey C. DeMotte was born on July 17, 1838 in Green County, Illinois. He was the sixth child born to John and Phebe (Cary) DeMotte. Not much is known about his early life prior to his attendance at Illinois Wesleyan University (IWU). He spent his boyhood on the family farm and he had very little early education. He became very fond of books and reading. Despite irregular school attendance, he was determined to get a good education for himself. In 1856, he entered school in Metamora, Illinois and a short time later made his way to Bloomington where he began attending IWU.

DeMotte began his studies at IWU in 1857. He was a very active student and involved in a variety of activities. Throughout his course of studies, DeMotte was a careful and hardworking student. He also showed a “special aptitude as a tutor and remarkable ability as a student in mathematics.” So much so that, on the day before he graduated on June 27, 1861, he was elected a professor of mathematics at the school.

DeMotte continued his studies doing graduate work even while he was “occupying the chair of mathematics” and serving as university librarian starting in September of 1861. His salary for his work as the chair of the mathematics department was \$300 per year, which would be about \$8,571 in 2018.

As DeMotte was beginning his career, his professorship was interrupted by the U.S. Civil War. On the night of May 24, 1862, the students and faculty “awoke to the ringing of the college bell.” Illinois Governor Richard Yates had sent a telegram asking “for 200 volunteers to report to Springfield by 9 o’clock the next morning” to serve for a period of three months as state militia. DeMotte and other Wesleyan students answered the call and a petition was circulated to ask that, instead of being part of the state militia, they be commissioned as Illinois Volunteers and be sent into the field. They began their service on June 20, 1862 as the 68th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment. DeMotte was elected to serve as a First Lieutenant in Company G.

After serving a brief guard duty at Camp Butler near Springfield, Illinois, on July 14 they were ordered to march to Alexandria, Virginia where DeMotte’s regiment was assigned as Provost Guards (military police for the Union Army). DeMotte was made an assistant provost marshal. While there, they also cared for the wounded from the Second Battle of Bull Run and even walked in review before President Lincoln. His regiment was then ordered back to Camp Butler in Springfield on September 17 where they were relieved of their service.

DeMotte then returned to his duties as professor of mathematics at IWU. In addition to his teaching duties, DeMotte became the music instructor in the newly founded department of vocal music. He also helped found the Alumni Association in 1863, and seven years later, helped start *The Alumni Journal*. It was also during this time that he met his future wife, Sarah J. Kern, of Atlanta, Illinois who had recently been placed in charge of the Model School (Preparatory Department), which was the teachers' training school at the university.

Sarah and Harvey were married on July 26, 1864 at Sarah’s father’s home in Atlanta, Illinois, not long after Kern became the principal of the Model School. She continued to serve as principal and teach at the school until 1867. Sarah and Harvey had three children, sons Lawrence and David, and daughter Clara Louise born in 1876. Their daughter Clara was the only child who survived to adulthood. The family lived at 902 N. Main St. in Bloomington, which was a house built by Sarah’s father in 1866. Harvey and Sarah lived there their entire married lives.

The beginning of the new 1864-1865 school year saw DeMotte move from his duties as librarian when he was made vice president of the university. He served as vice president until 1884. It was also in 1865 that DeMotte met and became friends and colleagues with explorer and naturalist John Wesley Powell (who taught natural sciences and geology at the college for three years). DeMotte's relationship with Powell would lead him on several adventures with the explorer to the largely uncharted territories of the West.

At the university's commencement exercise in June 1872, four years after Powell had resigned from Wesleyan, Powell came back to Bloomington to call upon his old friend and colleague DeMotte. Powell asked DeMotte to accompany him on a trip to the "far west" that summer to the Rocky Mountains. DeMotte eagerly accepted Powell's invitation to spend his summer vacation with him on the expedition. DeMotte's role on this expedition was to assist in "determining the latitude and longitude of the 'Base Line' survey" in northern Arizona and southern Utah, and to assist in some of the triangulation as well.

For a little over a month (July 15 through August 19), DeMotte and other members of the expedition traveled throughout the mountains, rivers, canyons, and ravines of northern Arizona and southern Utah. Powell engaged DeMotte's services to take mathematical observations during the expedition. DeMotte joined Powell again in 1874 for a second expedition, serving as a topographer during this journey.

After his adventures in the West with Powell, DeMotte returned to IWU to resume his duties as vice president. However, he became restless and began seeking new opportunities elsewhere in the Midwest. One such opportunity was when he accepted the position of president of Chaddock College in Quincy, Illinois in 1884. He and his wife Sarah resided there for a few years, but it does not appear that DeMotte found what he was looking for. He and his family returned to Bloomington in 1887. He was then appointed the superintendent of the Soldiers' Orphans' Home in Normal, Illinois (later renamed the Illinois Soldiers' and Sailors' Children's School). Sarah DeMotte served as the matron of the home. It was reported that because the couple were both trained educators and "were known to be successful in the management of children," that they would do well managing the home and caring for the children.

After about a 13-year absence, DeMotte returned to IWU in the fall of 1897. He was appointed professor of political economy and was also the secretary of the board of trustees. He spent the last seven years of his life back at the school which was never far from his mind no matter where he was living and working. In 1899, DeMotte took over as principal of the preparatory department (like his wife before him). Additionally, in 1903, he was again elected vice president of the university and resumed his duties as professor of math and astronomy.

On December 15, 1904, Harvey C. DeMotte died unexpectedly at his home on North Main Street. It was reported by *The Pantagraph* that he had been suffering for some time with an organic heart ailment, which forced him to take a temporary leave of absence from his duties at the university. However, in the days leading up to his death, he had partially recovered and resumed teaching his classes. On the day before his death, he was "at his usual place in the classroom and seemed much better than the week before." Funeral services were held at Grace Wesley Methodist Church with a large gathering of friends and family. He is buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.