

# “My Ma says that women ought to vote.”



by **Lynne Belluscio**

This extraordinary little drawing is in a sketchbook by Emelene (Emma) Dunn who attended Ingham University in 1884. It will be on display this summer in the “Remember the Ladies” exhibit at LeRoy House. The sketch was done in pencil, and only part of it has been inked. At the bottom of the page is written: “My Ma says that women ought to vote.” I have to wonder if Emma Dunn was a suffragette in 1885, much less her mother.

Emma was born in 1859 in Rochester. Her parents were Samuel and Harriet Newell Dunn. The family had come to Rochester from Connecticut. Emma graduated from the Rochester Free Academy and then in 1885, when she was twenty-six, she attended Ingham University and studied under the artist, Lemuel Wiles. In 1884 and 1885, the LeRoy

Suffrage Association was meeting frequently. Perhaps Emma was caught up in the suffrage movement but so far I haven’t been able to find anything else that would indicate her involvement with women’s rights. I have been trying to find out more about her brother, Thomas Dunn who served ten years in Congress in Washington. It would be interesting to find out what he had to say about women’s suffrage. (An interesting note about Thomas Dunn: He was the founder of the T. B. Dunn Manufacturing Company and he invented the mouth freshener “Sen Sen”. Flavored with licorice, Sen Sens were manufactured until 2013.)

After leaving LeRoy, Emma studied in Italy and France and then returned home and taught briefly in Canada and then at Brockport Normal School. She maintained a studio in New

York City for twenty years and established the New York Normal Art School for advanced instruction of teachers and supervisors of art. She taught in Burlington, Vermont and worked for the Prang Company of Boston and supervised drawing in the schools of New London and Willimantic, Connecticut. She is listed as lecturing in the Kindergarten Review, on the topic of “Correlated Art and Nature Work for Children” - - “We mold their minds into harmony with nature. Froebel meant that art should be carried to each child . . .”

During World War I, she devoted herself “to bringing comfort and cheer to American and Allied soldiers.” An article in the Democrat and Chronicle mentioned that her work during the war severely undermined her health and when she returned to Rochester, she was an invalid.

Yet she continued her work with veterans at the Rochester State Hospital. According to a book written by her sister Mary, “At times during her life, subjected to long ordeals of physical pain. She rose triumphant time and time again to carry on her chosen work. The most cruel of blows came when, long months before her death, physicians advised her to give up painting . . . she could do no more than thumbnail sketches and she did, hundreds of them as letter headings and greeting cards.”

Emelene Dunn died in 1929 and is buried in the family plot in Mt. Hope Cemetery in Rochester. Her sister, Mary, compiled many of Emma’s watercolors with selections of her writings about travel in the Mediterranean and published them in a book, “Mediterranean Picture Lands.”