

REDISCOVERING OUR BEST WORDS
A Long-Forgotten Shelby County, Illinois, Newspaper

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by Judy Rosella Edwards

I was a puny, crying child, my mother said, and she hardly expected to raise me. I have never weighed more than a hundred and thirty pounds, and am nearly six feet in height. When thirty-five years of age, insurance companies refused to take any risk on my life...during much of my ministerial life, I have been horizontal at least one day in the week, on an average and wholly unfit for any good to anybody. My mother died at fifty-eight, and I did not expect to live beyond that age.¹

Thus reads “Jasper L. Douthit’s Story,” the autobiography of a largely forgotten newspaperman from Shelby County, Illinois. This frail champion of reform issues of the day kept the presses rolling for forty-three years. At age 83, still at the helm as editor and publisher, Douthit apologized to his readers that he could no longer read a newspaper without a “hand glass” and announced he was, therefore, ceasing publication. In spite of what he referred to as his “failing faculties” he lived another decade, to the age of ninety-two.

The contributions to the world by this “feeble” journalist are enough to make most people weary. It is impossible to isolate any of his ventures from the whole. For the sake of brevity, it is possible to review only a handful of Douthit’s numerous endeavors.

An ordained Unitarian minister, Douthit once pastored five churches simultaneously. He served as missionary to Jacksonville, Alton, Hillsboro, Pana, Decatur, Farina, Centralia, Effingham, Charleston, Urbana and Champaign.² Douthit was asked to take on this missionary role by Dr. Edward Everett Hale, a Unitarian pastor possibly most remembered for his famous work,

¹Jasper L. Douthit, Jasper Douthit's Story; the Autobiography of a Pioneer, with an introduction by Jenkin Lloyd Jones.” (Boston: American Unitarian association, 1909), p. 14.

²Ibid., p. 170.

“The Man Without A Country.”³

As a part of his missionary efforts, Douthit operated the only chautauqua in Shelby County sanctioned by the International Chautauqua Association. In his spare time, Douthit served on the ICA board.

Lithia Springs Chautauqua was located on Douthit’s 250 acre property. The property still bears that name but now serves as a Lake Shelbyville recreation area owned and developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Publishing was merely a sideline for Douthit, as it was for many newspapermen of that era in Shelby County. For instance, the Shelbyville Independent, later known as the Shelbyville Democrat, was published by physician, Dr. E. E. Waggoner in the 1870s.⁴

Douthit did publish news and public notices year round. But he reserved space for Lithia Springs Chautauqua in summer. He gave priority to Unitarian issues but made a sincere attempt to include everyone. Readers were exposed to Catholicism, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and every “ism” in between. The front page originally read “For Church and Home.”

A faith-based paper was not a new concept. According to Garrison and DeGroot:

Periodicals were a strong asset to the (missionary) work in Illinois. By 1860 Barton W. Stone created the “Christian Messenger”, which was moved to Jacksonville, Illinois, in 1834. The “Berean” appeared at Springfield in 1838, edited by Alexander Graham. The “Christian” had but a one-year life (1847) in Edwardsville, with A. Padon as editor. The “Christian Sentinel” went to press at Springfield in 1853 under W. A. Mallory. The “Christian Freeman” was edited by W. S. Russell at Jacksonville during 1860. E. L. Craig and I. B. Boyle published the “Bible Advocate” from Jacksonville and Carrollton for a few years following 1859.⁵

³Eliot, Charles William, ed., The Harvard Classics Shelf of Fiction. (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1917).

⁴ ed., Combined History of Shelby and Moultrie Counties, Illinois: with illustrations descriptive of their scenery, and biographical sketches of some of their prominent men and pioneers. (Philadelphia: Brink, McDonough, 1881), p84.

⁵ Winfred Ernest Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot. The Disciples of Christ: A History. (St. Louis, Missouri: Christian Board of Publication, 1948).

Nor was it unusual for a wide range of newspapers to fire up the presses at that time. Between the years 1878 and 1880, six newspapers came into being in Shelby County. The Shelbyville Daily Democrat, the Greenback Herald and the True Democrat survived but a matter of months. Our Apiary, dedicated to beekeeping, had about the same life span. The Illustrated Baptist had little more staying power. By the time Douthit shut down the presses, only the Shelbyville Union, in its fiftieth year, and the Windsor Gazette, in its forty-eighth year of publication, could claim a longer history.

Douthit did, however, approach the task armed with a smattering of publishing experience. As a young man, Douthit briefly left Illinois and worked as an editor in the Boston office of Fowler & Wells, publishers of the Phrenological Journal. Throughout his life he remained intrigued by phrenology, as were many intellectuals of the time, which he took every opportunity to point out to his readers.⁶ Douthit claims his first sermon ever published appeared in the Phrenological Journal.⁷

The title of that first sermon was “Unity in Division,” which proved prophetic of his life’s work, especially in print. While he insisted unity was his greatest goal, he was repeatedly accused of creating divisions. Douthit sounded almost proud when accused of being a “crank,” to the point of once publishing the definition of the word on the front page of Our Best Words.

After marrying in Massachusetts and returning to Illinois, Douthit began publication of a four-page newspaper in Shelbyville called Church and Home in April 1880. Raw copy was sent to Funk & Wagnalls of New York to be edited. It is unclear where final copy was printed at that time, but Douthit did not set his own type for the first four years as a publisher.

After only five months Church and Home was reincarnated as an eight page newspaper and the name was changed to OBW.⁸ It started as a monthly and vacillated between a weekly and a

⁶ Douthit, p. 16.

⁷ Ibid., p. 165.

⁸ ed., Our Best Words, 5 Nov. 1884, p. 1.

monthly over the next four decades.

Sometimes Douthit suspended publication for a month or two for various reasons, such as lack of news – or lack of time to devote to publishing a newspaper. In January 1887, Douthit changed the volume numbering system at the request of his readers.⁹

By November 1884, circulation reached 1200 copies. Douthit and his family had taken full control of the paper. Douthit & Sons turned publishing into a thriving local family business. Using what was described as a small foot-power press barely large enough to print two pages at time, they churned out OBW at a rate of about a fourth of the output a newspaper that size could anticipate at the time.¹⁰

Forever fretting over finances, Douthit sold the paper in 1892.¹¹ Unhappy with the new publisher's Populist leanings, Douthit started another monthly paper called Simple Truth. After less than a year, Douthit re-purchased OBW and abandoned Simple Truth. He and his sons retained ownership for the duration until Jasper L. Douthit and OBW shared a mutual retirement in 1924.

Reading OBW in this millennium can be confusing. Douthit appears to be name-dropping and often fails to clarify the subjects of his writing. He assumes his readers are aware of the great array of movers and shakers whose names graced his columns and well-read on any topic he chose to address. But, unlike most publishers, Douthit had a personal relationship with these reformers, thinkers and intellectuals.

Rev. James W. Vallentyne wrote at the conclusion of Douthit's career:

In his activity he was an associate of the great liberals of America. He did teamwork with Edward Everett Hale, Henry Ward Beecher, Robert Coolyer [sic], Frances E. Willard, Booker T. Washington, James Freeman Clarke, Charles G. Ames, Minot G. Savage, William G. Eliot, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John D. Long, John G. Wooley, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, Rev. Henry H. Barber of Meadville (Theological) School and hosts of others. He had some contact as a boy with Abraham Lincoln and testifies to

⁹ ed., OBW, 8 Jan. 1887, p. 1.

¹⁰ "To Our Subscribers," ed., OBW, 7 Oct. 23, 1886, p. 1.

¹¹ Douthit, p. 160 ff.

the lifelong inspirations of Lyman Abbott.¹²

Matters of religion were always at the forefront of OBW. A hotly debated issue in the mid-1880s was over what has become known as “The Western Issue.” This division within the Unitarian church ironically resulted in a number of issues of OBW being preserved on microfilm by the Andover-Harvard Theological Library (the “Divinity Library” at Harvard). Certain copies bear a handwritten note “Western Issue.”

In the March 1885 issue Douthit published a lesson by Henry Ward Beecher. He had met Beecher while vacationing in New Hampshire in 1876.¹³ Douthit had been introduced to Beecher by William H. Baldwin, president of the Young Men’s Christian Union of Boston. Beecher and Douthit conversed at the foot of the White Mountains for the remainder of the week.¹⁴

In that 1885 issue, Douthit followed Beecher’s column with an original column of his own regarding “A Lesson from Unitarians in the State of Michigan.” In absolutely the most simplistic terms the “Western Issue” was over whether or not the Western Conference of the Unitarian Church should require the Michigan Unitarian Conference to specifically include Jesus or Christianity in the body of a proposed new constitution.

In two decades agnosticism, Ingersollism, materialistic Free Thought, the Free Religious Association, and the Ethical Culture movement had gained such a degree of popular attention and prestige that the conservatives became seriously alarmed.¹⁵

The “Western Issue” continued to consume the columns of OBW over the coming months and was never resolved to Douthit’s satisfaction. While he published articles about Buddhism, Judaism, Spiritualism and other isms, Douthit was adamant that everyone needed to be a Christian.¹⁶ In more modern terms, the real issue was whether there was room for religious tolerance

¹²“Concerning Tributes,” ed., OBW, 43 Jan. 1924, p. 2.

¹³Douthit, p. 147.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁵ Charles H. Lyttle, Freedom Moves West: A History of the Western Unitarian Conference 1852 - 1952. (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1952), p. 174.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 168.

within the church.

This was most evident in the chautauqua notices published in OBW. Religious leaders were among the headliners. However, Douthit was graciously inclusive of women and men of various denominations, especially those who rallied around suffrage, labor reform and civil rights.

Ada Kepley is one such personality frequently appearing on the pages of OBW. Kepley was a resident of Effingham, Illinois, some thirty miles away. She stood at the forefront of temperance and social purity reform. She advocated change through public speaking engagements and by editing and publishing a temperance monthly, Friend of Home.

She was a member of Douthit's church where she was ordained in 1892.¹⁷ Rev. Ada Kepley is probably more widely known as the first woman to earn a law degree. She graduated from the University of Chicago in 1870 with a bachelor's degree in law. In 1904, she earned her doctorate in law from Union College of Law. Union College later became Northwestern University Law School.¹⁸ She applied for a license to practice law, but was denied it because she was a woman.

She was, however, welcomed by Douthit who was unrelenting in his temperance efforts. He brought temperance workers to the Lithia Springs Chautauqua and published their lectures and letters in OBW.

The newspaper's slogan changed from "For Church and Home" to "For God and Home and Native Land." The headline for March 30, 1889, read, "The High License Policy in St. Louis."¹⁹ Reformers, temperance and prohibition speakers and conventions filled the pages. Readers were introduced to the work of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America. Alongside these reforms came the Social Purity Party espoused by Mrs. Ormiston Chant of England, and Mrs. Lenora L. M. Lake of the CTAUA, who both appeared at Lithia Springs chautauquas.

¹⁷ Douthit, p. 183.

¹⁸"Honor to Rev. Ada H. Kepley," OBW, 22 July.-Aug. 1904, p. 2.

¹⁹"The High License Policy in St. Louis," OBW, 10 Mar. 30, 1889, p. 1.

Frances Willard, founder of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, is known to have spoken in Shelbyville, but not at Lithia Springs. According to Douthit he shared the platform with Willard on that occasion.²⁰ He frequently quoted letters from Willard in the pages of OBW, especially her note dated July 26, 1894, from Evanston, where Willard, the first woman president of Northwestern University. It reads:

Evanston IL

Rev. J. L. Douthit,

Dear Brother: I have your unique paper, and I can but feel that if every paper in this country were at the same high level we should be on the high road to the millennium. You know that I am in the heartiest sympathy with you in all your great and beautiful work. All women owe you their thanks. We are in the same great battle wherever we may be, and I think you feel as I so that those who care for the same things and do the same work are really always in the same world of thought and growth.

Yours with sisterly regard,

Frances W. Willard.²¹

Suffrage was closely tied to temperance reform at that time.

Nobody questions Mrs. Helen Gougar's ability as a speaker and as an organizer and leader." "One hundred ladies led by Mrs. Gougar marched to the polls (in Morrison, Ill.) and staid [sic] there all day. Their appeals to the voters were not in vain. When the polls closed ... a great victory against the saloons was announced."²²

The above item was a teaser to create interest in Helen Gougar's scheduled appearance at the Shelby County Prohibition Conference in Shelbyville. Douthit reported, after the fact that "J. L. Douthit shared the platform with Mrs. Helen M. Gougar who spoke on "How to Raise Funds and Prepare for 1892" in reference to the upcoming elections.

Elsewhere on the page, he adds, "The editor of this paper will also answer calls when possible to lecture on the temperance reform of week day nights within the vicinity of Shelbyville."²³

²⁰ Douthit, p. 199.

²¹ OBW, 10 July 1894.

²² "Shelby County Prohibition Conference: In the Circuit Court Room, Shelbyville, Saturday, June 13, '91," OBW Weekly, 5 May 30, 1891, p. 4.

²³ "To Whom It May Concern," OBW Weekly, 5 May 30, 1891, p. 4.

As Frances Willard said, however, OBW was unique. In the June 20, 1891, edition Douthit ran a news item humanizing Mrs. Gougar, who was alleged to have been rather gruff. The story certainly adds a bit of local color:

After Mrs. Gougar had retired to rest last Saturday night in the Unitarian parsonage, a burglar tore out the wire screen in the window of her room and entered; but he stumbled over her valise and awoke her, whereupon she cried out: "Get out of here!" and he obeyed in a hurry and without having secured anything.²⁴

In the Nov. 14, 1891, edition OBW carried an article titled "School Suffrage in Illinois" written by Lucy Stone. The Illinois legislature had allegedly passed a law granting women school suffrage. Stone cites "fully ten thousand women" attempted to register to vote in school elections. Stone lists a score of women, including Frances Willard, who attempted to register under the law but were refused when the board of election commissioners took it upon themselves to interpret the law to exclude women.²⁵

Douthit apparently assumed his readers were aware Lucy Stone had joined forces with Henry Blackwell and Julia Ward Howe to create the American Woman Suffrage Association. The previous year the National American Woman Suffrage Association had been formed when AWSA joined forces with the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Douthit did live to see women's suffrage achieved and the NAWSA become the League of Women Voters in 1920.

But that was decades to come. In the Nov. 1891 edition, highlighted by Lucy Stone's news article, Douthit announced, "Mrs. Helen M. Gougar speaks on "Equal Suffrage" at the Court House at one o'clock."²⁶

Early in 1892, OBW carried several original responsive services penned by Douthit. These catechisms likely no longer exist other than in the pages of OBW. Among them was "A Woman

²⁴ "Out And About," OBW Weekly, 5 June 20, 1891, p. 6.

²⁵ "School Suffrage in Illinois," Lucy Stone, OBW Weekly, 5 Nov. 14, 1891, p. 2.

²⁶ "Out and About," OBW Weekly, 5 Nov. 14, 1891, p. 5.

Suffrage Catechism” that concluded that “all persons ... may vote excepting paupers, criminals, insane, idiots and women.” Subtlety was not always Douthit’s strong suit but clearly women’s suffrage had been added to the roster of reforms he advocated.

Among these were labor reform. Early in 1891, the front page began to carry a proclamation, “The People’s Paper and The Laborer’s Friend.”²⁷ That month Douthit attended the National Reform Party conference in Cincinnati where he was made a delegate under protest by the assembly.

The editor of OBW Weekly was also made delegate to the convention by virtue of his being editor of a reform paper. Our readers may not all know that we were positively denied membership in the National Reform Press Association before going to Cincinnati because we would not endorse the sub-treasury scheme advanced at the Ocala (Fla.) Convention last fall. ...there was some decided objection to admitting the editor of OBWW when his name was presented before the Illinois delegation for membership. Some persons seemed to dread a prohibitionist as if he were loaded with dynamite.” (At the Cincinnati Conference) of the National Reform party and HQ of the National Reform Press Association.²⁸

He was motivated by his friends and neighbors to press on in the face of criticism or adversity. In fact, he seemed to take pleasure in printing, typically on the front page of OBW, the most scathing of criticisms. Douthit reprinted items from 1863 and 1890 issues of the Okaw Patriot, calling him:

“maliciously dangerous to a community to the fullest extent of his mean capacity.” “He is a breeder of sedition and is daily seeking the life and blood of the genuine peace men of our county” and a “cadaverous apology for a man... (and) his deceitful little misnomer, the Best Words.” “He misrepresents the truth in every issue of his hypocritic Worst Words....”²⁹

Of course, Douthit was not above printing both sides of that coin when the opportunity presented itself. Helen Gougar learned there was a \$1,200 mortgage outstanding on the very parson-

²⁷ OBW Weekly, 5 May 09, 1891, p. 1.

²⁸ “Shelby County Delegates at Cincinnati,” OBW Weekly, 5 May 23, 1891, p. 1.

²⁹ “Look on That Picture,” and “And Then On This!” OBW Weekly, 5 Jan. 09, 1891, p. 1.

age in which she stayed when she was in Shelbyville. In today's economy that would amount to about \$23,000. Gougar conspired with Mrs. J. G. Cochran and others to give the Douthit family a "Silver Dollar Surprise." The idea was to raise enough silver dollars to reduce the mortgage, relieving Douthit from the financial strain.

Mrs. Cochran was a longtime member of Douthit's church. In fact, she and her husband were the first to donate money toward construction of the Unitarian church in Shelbyville. The widowed Mrs. Josephine (Garis) Cochran invented the Garis-Cochrane dishwasher, originally manufactured by Tait Manufacturing in Decatur, Illinois. Cochran exhibited her dishwasher at the Columbia Exposition in Chicago before selling the venture to Kitchen-Aid which still markets this contraption.

But in 1891, the Widow Cochran and other church members and friends stunned Douthit by raising \$1,339, or more than \$25,000 in today's currency. Along with the money came a flood of good wishes revealing who read OBW and held Jasper L. Douthit in respect. Always endeavoring to publish OBW, Douthit used his newspaper to preserve these sentiments of his supporters in their own words.

"Col. D. C. Smith sends his congratulations to "Jasper and his good wife" and a very pretty check for a nice sum."³⁰ Col. Smith was Dudley Chase Smith who had been a store clerk in Shelbyville before studying at his relative Philander Chase's Jubilee College. Smith's son would one day donate part of the Smith Farms to the University of Illinois as the Dudley Smith Initiative.

Smith modestly wrote to the organizers of the Silver Dollar Surprise, "I am glad that I am numbered among his friends and permitted to put in my mite." The colonel gave \$50.00, which would be the equivalent of nearly \$1,000 in today's market.

For years, OBW carried a large Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association banner on an inside page. There was a local connection to this defender of farm markets.

³⁰ OBW Weekly, 5 Nov. 14, 1891, p. 1.

W. H. Boles, National organizer of the FMBA and editor of the Liberator an independent reform weekly published at Springfield. The Liberator was formerly the Idea edited and published by J. A. Van Fleet, once editor of the Lever, Chicago, with whom and which Dr. Collins of the Christian church, Shelbyville, was associate editor.³¹

OBW often published FMBA speeches delivered by Francis Marion Perryman of Oconee Township in Shelby County. According to OBW, Perryman sang one of his “original farmer reform songs” at Douthit’s Silver Dollar Surprise.³² Perryman was known locally for authoring “Pioneer Life in Illinois” in which he talks about Douthit.³³

Representatives from Illinois State University contributed to the Silver Dollar Surprise. Shelbyville native, Hon. S. W. Moulton, known as the Father of Education in Illinois, sent a note saying, “Your influence has always been for the right. You have been outspoken, fearless, aggressive for the promotion of the great social and moral forms of the day.” Enclosed was \$250 (\$4,800).³⁴

Prof. Metcalf was the namesake of Metcalf School at Illinois State University. He sent “my offering in grateful appreciation of the Rev. Mr. Douthit’s services to his own neighborhood and to a large circle of readers.”³⁵

The parents of Paul Sargent, whose art is archived in the Tarble Arts Center at Eastern Illinois University, were among the well-wishers. John Stephen Sargent, a writer and member of the Koreshan Unity, wrote:

Hon. John S. Sargent and Wife, Hutton Ill.

We gladly send tribute in testimony of the self sacrifice and devotion to the up lifting

³¹ “Editorial Correspondence: From the Cincinnati Conference,” OBW Weekly, 5 May 23, 1891, p. 3.

³² “Grand Donation Party: Rev. J. L. and Mrs. Douthit the Victims of a Donation Surprise Party,” OBW Weekly, 5 Nov. 14, 1891, p. 1.

³³ Francis Marion Perryman, Pioneer Life in Illinois. (Pana: Kerr Publishing, 1907).

³⁴ “Hon. S. W. Moulton Makes a Christmas Gift of a \$250 Share in the Unitarian Parsonage,” OBW Weekly, 5 Nov. 21, 1891, p. 7.

³⁵ “From Prof. Metcalf of the Illinois State Normal School,” OBW Weekly, 5 Nov. 21, 1891, p. 6.

of humanity of our noble brother and sister, Rev. J. L. Douthit and Mrs. Douthit.
Respectfully,
John S. Sargent and Anna Sargent³⁶

Among the donors were “noble men and women of all classes and professions -- farmers, lawyers, preachers, editors, doctors, authors, poets, printers, wageworkers, school teachers, congressmen, governors, postmasters, bankers, jurists, orators, washerwomen, inventors, merchants, mechanics, college presidents, professors, railroaders, etc. The list contains also the names of Jew and Gentile, Roman Catholic and Protestant, orthodox and free thinkers. There happens to be many whose sect or party is not known to the writer. But we do know that Catholic, Quaker, Jew, Christian Scientist, Methodist, Free Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, United Brethren, Universalist, “Disciples,” Episcopalian, Trinitarian Congregationalist, Unitarian Congregationalists, Lutherans and Free Religionists are all represented in that list of nobles and saints among men and women.”³⁷

Some of Douthit’s relationships with this “noble” crowd came about as a result of the Lithia Springs Chautauqua. Unique and lost to history is Booker T. Washington’s connection to Douthit.

Washington’s name appears among the board of directors on Lithia Springs Chautauqua stationery. He spoke at Lithia Springs three times. Douthit was an avid abolitionist and published personal notes from Washington and news columns about his work in OBW.

Washington’s public speaking engagements were in high demand at the turn of the century as he solicited support for Tuskegee Institute. His 1903 appearance at Lithia Chautauqua could have been yet another whistle stop. But OBW adds new dimension to history.

In his published papers, Washington wrote a letter on August 6 (the day before he addressed Lithia Springs) from Petersburg, Illinois, home of the Old Salem Chautauqua. He had just

³⁶ “The Surprise,” OBW Weekly, Ibid.

³⁷ “Aftermath of The Surprise,” OBW Weekly, Ibid., p 4.

received word that, following a legal battle, William Trotter and two others were to serve 30 days in jail for disrupting one of his speeches in Boston, Mass.

Booker T. Washington opened the 13th annual session at Lithia Springs Chautauqua at 2 pm on Saturday, Aug 7. After Chautauqua Superintendent Randle had introduced “the great mental and spiritual emancipator of his race,” Mr. Washington responded to the welcome with far more heartfelt gratitude than was probably apparent to the crowd. Douthit published part of Washington’s address in OBW.

I am glad to return to Lithia Springs for the third time. I am always glad to come here. I am always glad to shake the hand of your leader. I have refused invitations to at least twenty-five Chautauquas this season and this is the third and last one that I shall attend. I came to Lithia Springs because I believe in what you are doing and in the way you are doing it. Because you are strong for reality, simplicity, getting down to nature. I am glad to see your children get out where they can wade in the water, hear the songs of the birds and live near nature. I was born in a log cabin, and I haven’t felt so much at home for fifteen years as when Brother Douthit put me in that log cabin.³⁸

On August 8, Washington wrote to Emmett Jay Scott from Shelbyville creating probably the only documentation remaining in his papers placing him in Shelbyville. Washington left for a much-needed three week vacation in Europe. He was no doubt feeling the stress of endless speaking engagements and fundraising, legal battles over civil rights along with the criticism recently leveled at him by W.E.B. DuBois in “The Souls of Black Folk.” He was also surely aware of trouble brewing at Tuskegee.

While he was abroad, 47 students left Tuskegee University during a three-day strike at Washington’s treasured school. “Booker Washington’s Kind Words for Lithia” are quite poignant against this backdrop of history.

Washington’s mission for years was to garner support for Tuskegee Institute. Ironically, in 1904, Washington gave Douthit’s chautauqua and Shelby County a huge gift. He donated 500 volumes to the first library in the Shelbyville, Illinois, area. The Log Library, home to these

³⁸ “Booker Washington’s Kind Words for Lithia”, OBW, 21 June-July 1903, p. 9.

tomes, at Lithia Springs was dedicated Tuesday, August 23, 1904.³⁹

All the Lithia Springs Chautauqua buildings are gone, including the Log Library. OBW ceased publication decades ago. Douthit's Unitarian Church in Shelbyville was razed about the time the Kaskaskia was dammed to create Lake Shelbyville. The brick parsonage so many "noble men and women" passed through and helped pay for with a "Silver Dollar Surprise" has been converted into an apartment house.

Women won the vote. Prohibition has come and gone. The fight for labor, political reform and civil rights continues. There have been those who recognized and preserved Douthit's activism. Half a dozen issues of OBW were donated to the Harvard Divinity School as a "Gift of John Hopkins Morison."

June McCain, a longtime volunteer of the Shelby County (Illinois) Historical and Genealogical Society, has meticulously saved dozens of original copies of OBW. Many issues are bound into volumes. Some bear the names of subscribers. Thanks to these two individuals, Douthit's words have been preserved and deserve to be read once more.

Late in life, Douthit reflected on what motivated him to continue:

The next number closes the thirty-third volume of thip [sic] paper. For many years at first OBW was the only paper in this county that stood firmly in the fore-front of battle for reform policies and righteous causes in state and nation that were then everywhere spoken against. Now many of those reforms are favored by most of the papers of this and adjoining counties. For this progress, we may thank God and take courage.⁴⁰

Rev. James W. Vallentyne of Unity Church, Oak Park, Ill, most famous for its building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, wrote of his friend in the final issue, January 1924, "OBW will not be continued. There is no other Jasper L. Douthit to carry it on."

He felt that the files of Douthit & Sons, Publishers would stand a finished monument to the

³⁹ "Lithia Springs Chautauqua - Fourteenth Annual Program", Aug. 7 - 23, 1904.

⁴⁰ "Very Special Notice By the Editor," OBW, 33 Nov. 1913, p. 3.

“labor and genius of this stalwart man.” Vallentyne concluded Douthit’s work had been so unique and his parish of readers so personal it would be futile for others to even attempt to continue the work.

Without reading the pages of Douthit’s newspapers, such a statement sounds outrageous. But Douthit was an outrageous figure.

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She has written for the Bloomington Pantagraph, the Pekin Times and other newspapers. She is the editor of “The Shelby County Independent Index - Mar. 23, 1876, through Oct. 6, 1876,” “Lake Shelbyville: A River DOES Run Through It” and “Dora Etta Wade Diaries: 1931 to 1937.”

Edwards volunteers as host to the Shelby County section of the Illinois Trails project at <http://www.iltrails.org/shelby/>. Her ancestors were among the first European settlers in Shelby County.

She and her husband, Jeff Imig, live in Mackinaw, Ill., with their four cats.