

The Farwell Factor

Farwell is a name that pops up often in the annals of Lake Forest. The Farwell family has been connected not only with Lake Forest but its influence extends to Chicago, Washington, D.C. and even Texas. The Farwells embody the spirit of the American Dream.

Two Farwell brothers are the ones who are closely identified with Lake Forest. Their parents had migrated from New York State to Mt. Morris, IL. It was Charles B. and John V. who moved to Chicago at the precise time when Chicago was becoming an important rail hub and a commercial center. Charles was the banker and a politician who served as Congressman and a United States Senator. Brother John was hugely successful as a wholesale merchant. In 1857, both men became interested in the Lake Forest Association, the group that planned the community associated with the establishment of Lake Forest College, and association that has continued until the present day. In 1869, both brothers moved to Lake Forest where they built stately homes near Lake Michigan. John Farwell was elected mayor of the town in 1871, the first of many Lake Forest mayors from the Farwell family.

Brother Charles may have been one of the movers and shakers who helped to establish Lake Forest College but it was his wife, Mary Smith Farwell, whose Lake Forest College connection is better known. Mary had herself been trained at an academy in her original home in Williamstown, Massachusetts and she had once taught English, History, and Latin. Lake Forest Academy had been intended to be the first stage of what would be named Lind University. However, during the Civil War, it had declined and it was Mary Farwell who established what we now know as Lake Forest College.

Mary was adamant that her daughter Anna attend a school of higher learning and that it be located close to home. Furthermore, Mary strongly felt that the school be co-educational. When the new school opened its doors in 1876, Anna and one other young lady enrolled. In their graduating class of seven, Anna was the valedictorian and her classmate, Josephine White, was salutatorian. The school continued to prosper under the aegis of Mary Farwell who had hired faculty and given scholarships to worthy Chicago students.

The influence of this, one of the first founding families of Lake Forest, is still felt today. Several of their descendants have been active in City government, including Kent Chandler and Frank Farwell.