

# Margaret Shepard Edwards

## Pioneer Oswego Businesswoman

*Compiled by Roger Matile  
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Margaret Ruth Shepard was born March 8, 1846 in Kendall Township, Kendall County, Illinois, the daughter of a prosperous farmer and his wife, David and Susanna Mary (LeStourgeon) Shepard. Mary died in 1856, and in February 1857, David remarried Elizabeth H. Ewing.

Margaret, called Maggie by her family and friends, taught school in the NaAuSay Township area as well as traveling to Centralia to teach school. She arrived back in Kendall County in July 1874, apparently determining to go into business for herself.

She moved to Oswego in 1875 and at the age of 29 began working in the milliner's trade, manufacturing ladies' hats and fans. In late March 1876, she opened her own milliner shop in the Smith Building, which stood at the northwest corner of Main and Washington. In the summer of 1878, she moved the business to the second floor of the Shaver Building in the then relatively new brick block on the east side of Main Street between Washington and Jackson. In 1883, she moved the business yet again to a former private residence in downtown Oswego, buying the home a few months later. Only a month later, she moved the business again, this time back to a home on Washington Street.

In 1885, at the age of 39 possibly fearing she would never find a husband, Maggie adopted a five year-old girl, Stella, from the Chicago Orphan Asylum. It is not known how common it was for single women to adopt children in the 1880s, but it's probably fair to suggest that it was uncommon for a single woman of that era to own her own business, a house, and adopt a child.

In March 1888, Maggie moved her millinery business one last time, to the home formerly occupied, and owned, by Oswego pioneer Marcius C. Richards. The house was situated on Washington Street adjoining the alley that ran parallel to Main Street from Washington to Jackson Street behind the Main Street brick block.

On Jan. 23, 1889, the *Kendall County Record's* Oswego correspondent reported that: "Maggie R. Shepard, Oswego's successful and popular milliner, has bought the M.C. Richards' place, of which she was the tenant, and by the way that sagacious new clever correspondent for the Herald has thrown out the hint that Maggie may take in a partner; she is now well fixed for such a step."

Maggie married Thomas C. Edwards in July 1890 when she was 44 years old. Edwards was an Oswego hardware merchant who was in business with his brother. The two lived

in Maggie's house and milliner's shop on Washington Street where she continued to carry on her business. Shortly after the marriage, the Edwards' remodeled and added on to their home on Washington Street, including adding a new, fashionable, bay window.

In the fall of 1897, Maggie decided to retire. As the *Record's* Oswego correspondent put it: "Mrs. Maggie Edwards, after carrying on most successfully the millinery business here for 20 years, proposes now to sell out and retire. It is the only establishment of the kind in town and hence a good opening for some one to get into a profitable business."

Although she married Tom Edwards, he did not adopt Stella. Maggie's daughter kept the name Shepard until her marriage. As the *Record* reported on June 26, 1901: "One of the prettiest weddings of the season occurred Wednesday evening June 19 at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Edwards when their daughter, Miss Stella Shepard, became the wife of Mr. Albert L. Woolley, oldest son of Mr. and Mrs. George Woolley. A beautiful new house is being erected about a mile east of town where Mr. and Mrs. Woolley will be at home to their friends after Aug. 1."

Tom Edwards died Dec. 23, 1911. His *Kendall County Record* obituary offered a brief outline of his life: "In ill health for some time, Thomas C. Edwards has been gradually failing until with the last issue we chronicled the illness pneumonia, from which he did not rally. Saturday evening death relieved him from all suffering. He was born Jan. 9, 1847 in Wales, coming to this country with his people when a young boy about 10 years of age. With them he located in Oswego township where he resided the remainder of his life, residing in the village of Oswego. A widow, Mrs. Margaret Edwards; one sister, Mrs. George Collins; and the daughter, Mrs. Albert Woolley, are left to mourn his death. July 3, 1890 he was married to Margaret Shepard, residing in Oswego. Funeral services were held Tuesday from the late home."

In the Jan. 3, 1912 "Tamarack and Wheatland" column in the *Kendall County Record*, the correspondent paid tribute to Edwards: "A number from here attended the funeral of Thomas Edwards in Oswego. Deceased formerly owned property about a mile and a half west of Tamarack and at one time lived here and had many friends who were shocked to hear of his death."

With Tom's death, Maggie continued to live in Oswego where she enjoyed her daughter and her grandchildren. She died at 82 years of age on Feb. 17, 1929 in Oswego, and is buried in the Oswego Township Cemetery.

Her *Kendall County Record* obituary, published on Feb. 20, 1929, recorded her eventful life: "Mrs. Margaret Shepard Edwards, the widow of the late Thomas C. Edwards, died at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Albert Woolley at Oswego early Sunday morning, Feb. 17, 1929.

"Mrs. Edwards will be remembered as a woman of an especially bright and sunny disposition, which she maintained to the last. She had been failing in health and strength for the last few years and this winter made her home with her daughter, Stella. Gradually,

she grew weaker and while not confined to her bed, fell asleep Saturday night to awaken on the other shore.

“Mrs. Edwards was born in Kendall township on March 8, 1846, the daughter of David C. and Susannah Le Sturgeon Shepard, early pioneers of Kendall county. As a young woman, she taught school in NaAuSay township, coming to Oswego in 1875, she conducted a millinery store until 1898 On July 3, 1890, she was united in marriage with Thomas C. Edwards, who died Dec. 23, 1911.

“On coming to Oswego in 1875, Mrs. Edwards united with the Oswego Presbyterian church and has been an active and faithful member ever since.

“Mrs. Edwards leaves to mourn her loss a brother, Charles F. Shepard of Yorkville; a sister, Mrs. Johnston of Pasadena, Calif.; a daughter, Mrs. Albert Woolley of Oswego; besides three grandsons and many nieces and nephews.”

The funeral, conducted by her former pastor, Rev. James R.E. Craighead of Creston, Ia., was held at the Oswego Presbyterian church Feb. 19, 1929 and she was laid to rest in the Oswego cemetery. A resident of Oswego over 50 years, she will be greatly missed by those who knew and loved her best.

#### **News clips from the *Kendall County Record*:**

July 23, 1874: Miss Maggie Shepard has returned from Centralia, where she has been teaching.

March 30, 1876: Mrs. William W. Pearce is setting up a milliner establishment over the post office; she is now in Chicago selecting the stock. It is said that Miss Maggie Shepard is also preparing to set up a similar establishment, having engaged the upper rooms of the Smith building on the corner of Main and Washington streets.

April 6, 1876: Miss Maggie Shepard's millinery establishment is on the ground floor instead of up stairs as I said last week.

Jan. 17, 1878: Miss Maggie Shepard has gone on a visit to Vandalia; during her absence her sister Mary is superintending the millinery store.

Aug. 22, 1878: Miss Maggie R. Shepard has moved her establishment into the business centre of the town and is now occupying the upper floor of the Shaver building in the brick block--the rooms lately vacated by Dr. Putt. A very handsome show case filled with lady's head embellishments, near the foot of the stairway, is ornamenting the sidewalk and showing where to find the Millinery Bazaar.

Nov. 14, 1878: A Mrs. Prior has set up a dressmaking establishment in the rooms with Maggie Shepard.

March 8, 1883: Miss Maggie Shepard's millinery establishment has been removed to the house heretofore occupied by Irene Billings.

April 26, 1883: Miss Ellen Devereaux of Plattville is assistant milliner at Maggie Shepard's establishment.

Aug. 2, 1883: Maggie Shepard has become a freeholder; she has bought the place in which her millinery business is carried on.

Sept. 17, 1884: Maggie Shepard has moved her millinery establishment to the Shaver house on Washington street, lately vacated by the family of T.J. Pigott.

Oct. 22, 1884: Maggie Shepard has returned from a month's visit with relatives at Bancroft, Iowa, with renewed energies for prosecuting the Milliner business; a fresh stock of supplies were laid in since her return.

Dec. 9, 1885: Dec. 9: Maggie Shepard has adopted a little girl from the Chicago Orphan Asylum.

July 21, 1886: Maggie Shepard is not only getting up the loveliest head dresses, but is also raising the largest gooseberries--the same measuring three inches around and weighing three-eighths of an ounce.

July 28, 1886: Stella, the little girl with Maggie Shepard, had her older sister make her a visit.

May 18, 1887: Addie Van Evra is learning millinery with Maggie Shepard and Jennie Miller dressmaking with Mrs. Schwarz.

Aug. 24, 1887: Maggie Shepard is on a visit to her sister in Iowa. Her business [millinery shop] here is in charge of Addie Van Evra.

March 7, 1888: Charles Shibley of Aurora was in town for several days painting and papering the M.C. Richards house preparatory to the occupying of it for the millinery shop of Maggie Shepard who moved into it Friday.

Jan. 23, 1889: Maggie R. Shepard, Oswego's successful and popular milliner, has bought the M.C. Richards' place, of which she was the tenant, and by the way that sagacious new clever correspondent for the Herald has thrown out the hint that Maggie may take in a partner; she is now well fixed for such a step.

March 20, 1889: Maggie Shepard's buildings have been made handsome by a renewal of the paint.

Sept. 18, 1889: Maggie Shepard went Monday to Chicago and will spend several days there selecting goods for the fall stock. She was accompanied by Miss Louise Jessup. The little girl Stella in the meantime is visiting with friends near Yorkville.

July 9, 1890: July 9: The marriage of Thomas Edwards and Maggie R. Shepard took place Thursday at Aurora.

Sept. 10, 1890: One of the handsomest houses on Washington street will be that of the Thomas Edwards family. The old part has been entirely reconstructed and a large bay window added to the front. The very handsome job of painting was performed by Bradford.

Oct. 1, 1890: Mrs. Maggie R. Edwards, accompanied by Lillie Collins, was in Chicago last week and bought a fresh stock of millinery goods for her new and elegant shop.

Aug. 31, 1892: A new addition for a kitchen is being built to Thomas Edwards' residence.

Oct. 5, 1892: Alice Collins is now the apprentice at Mrs. Maggie Edwards' millinery shop.

May 26, 1897: Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Edwards are enjoying a new surrey.

Sept. 22, 1897: Mrs. Maggie Edwards, after carrying on most successfully the millinery business here for 20 years, proposes now to sell out and retire. It is the only establishment of the kind in town and hence a good opening for some one to get into a profitable business.

Jan. 26, 1898: The death of David Shepard, who had been lying helpless and down sick for a number of years at the residence of his daughter, Mrs. Margaret R. Edwards, took place Thursday and the funeral at the house Saturday. The body was taken to the NaAuSay cemetery for interment. Deceased was within two months of being 85 years of age. He was born in Salem, Mass. In his early life he was a sailor and then circumnavigated the globe; came to Illinois in 1837, where he followed farming. Two wives followed him to the grave.

June 8, 1898: Thomas Edwards has the village waterworks connected with his residence.

March 6, 1901: The Thomas Edwards residence has been supplied with the acetylene light.

June 26, 1901: One of the prettiest weddings of the season occurred Wednesday evening June 19 at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Edwards when their daughter, Miss Stella Shepard, became the wife of Mr. Albert L. Woolley, oldest son of Mr. and Mrs. George Woolley. A beautiful new house is being erected about a mile east of town where Mr. and Mrs. Woolley will be at home to their friends after Aug. 1.

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