Grant Hood's Sister Sundials

This is the story of Grant Hood's two sister sundials. Both brass, eighteen-inch, horizontal dials commemorate notable occasions, and both are exquisitely and accurately designed. In addition to the designer's name and location, the face of each states its motto, "TIME FLIES," and is marked with "LAT. 40° 43'" and the date, "1905." Its Roman numerals are accented with *fleurs de lis* and separated by five-minute markers.

And both share a history of prominent display followed by ignominious outcast, and eventual redemption.

In 1892, the Laporte, Indiana, Parson's Horology School had relocated to Bradley Polytechnic Institute in Peoria, Illinois. One of its Professors, Grant Hood, who authored a number of influential horology books, designed an eighteen-inch, eight-sided horizontal sundial that he presented to Bradley shortly before his retirement due to ill health in 1905. He and his wife were respected and popular horology teachers and arts and crafts club sponsors. Grant Hood was a successful award-winning photographer and artist who shared his interests with students at the Institute. The sundial stood in front of the Horology Building for an undetermined number of years before it was put into dark storage and apparently forgotten. It was said to have been "given" to a Bradley faculty member, Robert Mintmier, during an attic cleaning probably connected to military use of the Horology Hall in the 40's. He much later sold it in 1996. It was purchased the next year from an antique dealer in Pennsylvania by sundial collector, Neil W. Bohnert, who contacted the Bradley University Library Special Collections Department to report the purchase and ask for information. Coincidentally, he has recently purchased a house in Lynchburg, Virginia, built in 1905. Of course, all rejoice in the rediscovery of this long lost and almost forgotten artifact and its return to the sun for which it was designed.

As it turns out, Grant Hood had at least two castings made of his sundial – the one he gave to Bradley that has migrated to Pennsylvania and to
Virginia and the one that may be seen in Peoria's Glen Oak Park. While the dial faces are the same, the gnomons are now different, but both are correctly set at forty degrees. We may only speculate about whether they were originally designed differently, or which one may have been replaced

In 1894, 2,672 male voters of Peoria, Illinois, voted to establish the Pleasure Driveway and Park District. Only 1,100 voted against, and we can only speculate what the total would have been had women been allowed the vote. By 1896, Glen Oak Park was graced with a Conservatory called the Palm House, and in time for its tenth anniversary, it was further graced with installation of the sister of Grant Hood's Bradley sundial, presented in October 1905 by Lydia Anna Emery Kinsey, the wife of the Park Board's President Samuel A. Kinsey. Perhaps

coincidentally, the date also marked the fiftieth anniversary of their arrival in 1856 from their birthplace in New Jersey.

They were a robust couple. Together they had six children, all of whom survived childhood. Lydia was especially interested in the welfare of the veterans of the Civil War and worked tirelessly for their benefits and recognition. She was accorded the honor of unveiling the Soldiers' Monument when it was dedicated by President McKinley at the County Courthouse in 1898. She died in 1909 at the age of 77. Samuel had started a brass foundry in the almost-frontier town and probably was responsible for casting the sundials. He traveled to Chattanooga with Olmstead-trained Landscape Architect Oscar F. Dubuis to study Lookout Mountain as a model for the Peoria Parks, and eventually served as Peoria's Park District President and Mayor. Mr. Kinsey lived to the age of 93

Mrs. Kinsey observed, "a reproduction of such an instrument (a sundial) would be of interest to many visitors and would not detract from the beauties of Glen Oak."

The sundial continued to interest many visitors and to not detract from the beauties of Glen Oak until 1951 when the Palm House was torn down. Relegated to sun-less storage, it saw the sun again only when it was reinstalled in 1974 in the herb garden adjacent to the new Conservatory.

To enhance its eight sides, the Kinsey Sundial is mounted on an eight-sided base with a dedication plate "Presented by - Mrs. S.A. Kinsey - October 1905." It is now situated on an eight-sided aggregate pad with eight path rays extending beyond. The aggregate pad and its path rays are oriented perpendicular to the nearby greenhouse, but accurately and delightfully, the sundial and its base are quaintly askew the pad and correctly oriented to the sun.

There in June 2005, seeming to look just a little to its left, the Kinsey Sundial was rededicated with a reenactment featuring Miranda Friend and Robby Axsom to celebrate its one-hundred years, successfully telling its hours for seventy-seven years in the sun and ever grateful to have been rescued from its twenty-three years in exile. And also grateful to know its long-lost sister had been found somewhere in Pennsylvania.

James Ludwig
854 E. High Point Terrace
Peoria, Illinois 61614
ludwig@bradley.edu

Ref:

- Vertical Files of University and the Peoria Historical Society held in Bradley University Library Special Collections Center.
- Deller, Karen and Schneider, Sherri, Bradley University Library Special Collections Center.
- Lister, Amy, Luthy Botanical Garden, Peoria Park District.
- Vest Wheeler, Monica, *The Grandest Views: A History of the Peoria Park District*, Peoria Journal Star, Inc. 1994.