

## Julia (Sparr) Coffin

Julia Sparr Coffin was born July 17, 1853 to Rev. James and Rachael Sparr of West Adams Street, Muncie. After graduation, Julia taught school for several years, but did not make teaching a career. She wanted to be a doctor, she studied under Dr. G.W.H. Kemper of Muncie. In 1878, she went to Foo Chow China as a medical missionary. Julia met John Coffin while serving in China. They came home on a furlough and were married in Muncie on May 1, 1884. The couple returned to China where John became a leading merchant of Foo Chow.



Many of the letters Julia wrote to her parents were published in the Muncie Weekly Times and can be read at the Delaware County Historical Society. Many of these letters talk about her frustration with learning the language because the Chinese manner of making sentences is the opposite of ours. She explained that one may know the words to make up a sentence and the tone of the words, but if you do not arrange the words correctly, the Chinaman would not understand what you meant.

Her Chinese name “Sia” which meant “thanks” was a beautiful name, but one Christmas she wrote about being homesick. Not to see her family and friends, because God had given her a way of being content with whatever lot she was put into. She went on to say that it was just a longing for someone to call her “Julie” or “Jule” instead of “Sia”.

Julia wrote a very sad letter to her parents in November of 1878. She stated that the doctor had to amputate both limbs of a fifteen-year-old girl, and the girls’ people did not want her back after seeing her condition. It seems her people had bought her when she was six years old and betrothed her for 75,000 cash (between 60 and 70 American dollars at the time). Now they were upset because they would not be able to complete the betrothal or get their money back.

During one of her trips, Julia did something a bit risky. It was a cool misty morning in August with a flurry of snow when she went on a trip to see the Great Wall of China. When nobody was looking, Julia knelt and dug a rock from the wall. She carried it back to her residence, forty-five miles while riding on a donkey. The rock was not tiny, but measured seven inches thick, fourteen inches long and eight or nine inches wide. She brought it to the Muncie as a gift for Dr. Kemper.

While living in China, Julia and John became parents of a son, Eugene, in March of 1888.

Julia returned to the United States after visiting Arabia, the Red Sea, Egypt and the Holy Land.

She and her husband lived in Chicago until her death January 31, 1920. She is buried in Plymouth, New Hampshire beside her husband.

