

RURAL VOICES ON THE PATH TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

TOWN OF LANSING

A CONTRAST OF UNUSUAL WOMEN

Women come in all varieties and Lansing women cannot be categorized. What makes a woman notable? Is it her good deeds and compassion for others like Betsey Barber? Is it her determination and abilities to accomplish great things despite societal conventions and expectations, like Alice Bristol? Is it just the notoriety of her actions—good or evil—like Elizabeth Whitlock? Surely all these women had an impact on our community in their own way.

BETSEY BARBER — UNSUNG HERO OF LANSING



Federalist Home similar to that of Betsey Barber

Betsey Barber was born January 31, 1827 and lived her short life on Jerry Smith Road in Lansing, New York. In January of 1852, at the age of 25, she began to keep a diary. From what one can gather there was a serious illness in the family and the neighborhood (probably tuberculosis). Perhaps that is the reason she felt compelled to keep a record. She led an uneventful life centered on the church and her family and neighbors. But she was quite intelligent, and wrote interesting critiques of the sermons and meetings she attended. She was also fond of reading and read such books as "Green Mountain Boys" of which she wrote, "Do not think I will be much benefitted by it." Other books she read were: "Geudder's (Scudder's?) Letters to Children", "The Letters of Fanny Woodbury", "The History of Reprobation", "The Life of P. Tomas", "Sketches" by Hirdly, "Insubordination" by T.G. Arthur, "Uncle Tom's Cabin", and "Harper's Magazine". She

also read the Bible and studied Algebra. In her more regular life she washed and ironed, cooked and baked, cleaned and visited neighbors and was visited in return. She attended many funerals and helped prepare clothing to dress the women in their caskets. She was a good neighbor to the ill and lonely. She spent one evening with a poor woman "whose hope of happiness seemed to extend beyond this world". One cold January day a fugitive slave spent the night with her family. The next day she gave the fugitive 25 cents as he went on his way. On April 11 Betsey's baby sister died, followed on April 25th by her mother. Shortly after that her diary ends. On March 25, 1854 Betsey wrote that she was very ill and expected to die soon. She died June 29, 1854, aged 27 years, 5 months. One might think that Betsey was not an important woman in the history of Tompkins County. But she represents all the unsung heroes of a woman's life in the middle of the nineteenth century.

IT HAPPENED IN LANSING By ISABELLE PARISH

Judges Fail Woman in Debate

The N.N.P. Lyceum, a society of two years' standing and one that has given more literary entertainment to the good people of Lansing than all others combined, still flourishes. Every Monday evening finds us at work upon some question that is both instructive and entertaining, said a news report of 1869.

The Lyceum presented January 6, 1869, a debate on the resolution, "That the right of suffrage should be extended to women."

After an interesting debate listened to by an appreciative audience, the judges decided that "woman now occupied her proper sphere."

This decision brought a fiery criticism from Mary A. Wager of New York City, who described herself as "being a Tompkins County child." She was born on Algerine Road in the Town of Lansing, and had become a newspaper writer.

Said she: "It is a pity that that humble village could not be scooped up out of the hollow in which it grovels and be set upon a hill where the sunlight of progress and common sense could vitalize it."

"I haven't talked with an intelligent, large-brained man in six months, so old-fogyish, so narrow-minded, so dead to every sense of right, justice, progress or simple Christianity, as to think that women should not have suffrage or that the ballot was going to 'take her out of her sphere' or to 'man-ize her.'"

Concluded she: "Now, you must pardon so much 'woman talk,' in this letter. It is all owing to that Ludlowville decision, which arouses me to a sense of the pre-Adamite state of opinion in my native town."

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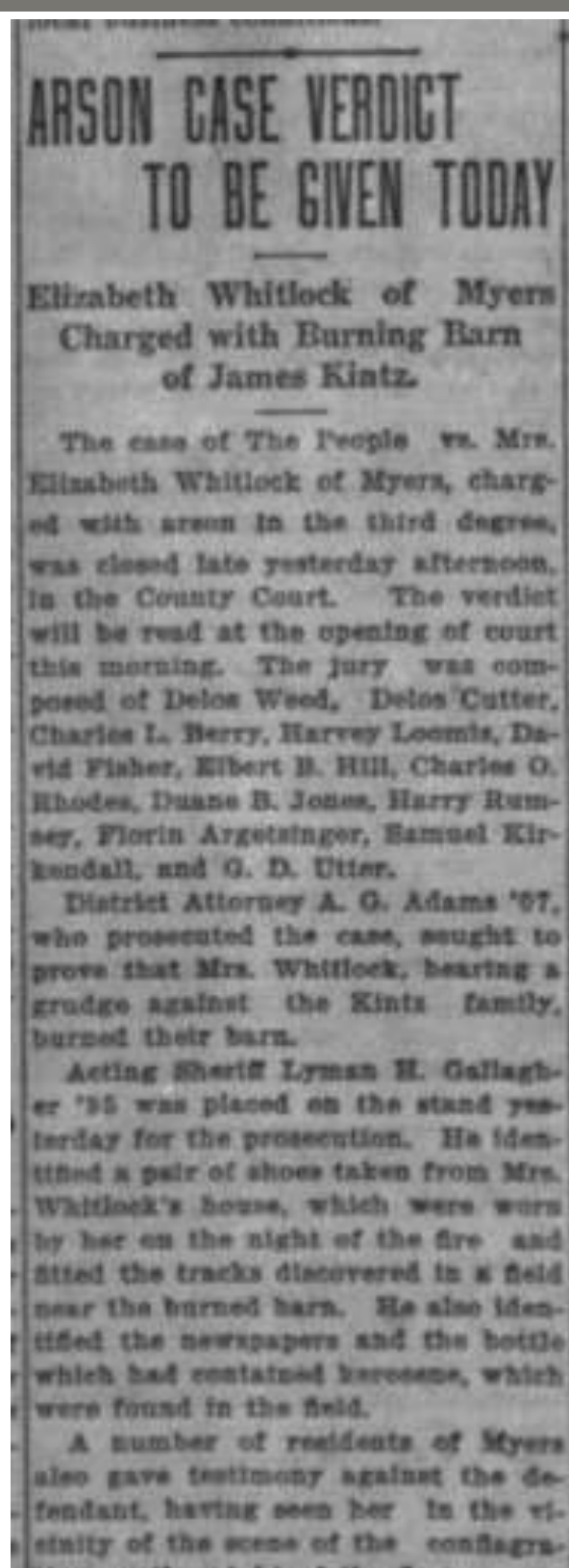
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ALICE BRISTOL — A LEADER AHEAD OF HER TIME

Alice Bristol was born in 1858, and died in 1940. She was a spunky girl who grew up in Ludlowville; a mature woman who was principal of a select boarding school for girls in Washington, D.C.; an educated woman who never married. Alice had been engaged to Will Barr of Ludlowville, and when he broke off the engagement, she sued him for breach of promise and used the money to buy a large house in Washington D.C. for her boarding school. A 1913 annual or yearbook called the Bristolian is filled with pictures of the girls in the graduating class. This annual also contains a calendar of events beginning on October second and going to April fifteenth. March third was the Suffragette Parade and March fourth was President Wilson's inauguration parade. November eleventh was the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Reception given by the Southern Relief Society to which the school was invited. Miss Bristol then had a reception for the U.D.C. on November fourteenth, a lovely affair marked especially by the presence of Hon. and Mrs. William Jennings Bryan. Alice was very interested in the history of the hamlet of Ludlowville and wrote a large manuscript about the hamlet and its people. It was never published, although she tried to get it in print. We find it a valuable piece of Lansing history. When Alice was a young girl she had to pass the tannery on the way to school. She had been told that a goblin lived in the coffins stored in the tannery. For three days she provided herself with protection from the goblin. The first day she carried a hatchet. It had to be given up when her family discovered the whereabouts of the missing hatchet. The second day she made do with a broken branch. The third day it snowed and she made a good hard snowball, wrapped it in rags, and carried it hidden beneath her cloak. When a boy teased her she whipped out the snowball and hit him in the face. This had such good results that she decided her fear of a mere goblin was unfounded. On the way home she stopped at the tannery, made a face at the goblins coffin home, and was forever cured of her fear of goblins. Alice and her sister, Kate, were young ladies of the 1860's. They were required to learn to knit, sew, and crochet and had to do a certain amount of housework. But they walked barefoot in all the puddles of the dirt road and swung on the low branches of the willow trees after a rain to get a nice shower. Alice was a strong, opinionated woman. She was ahead of her time in her belief that women could lead independent lives.



ELIZABETH WHITLOCK — WITCH OF SYRIAN HILL



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Elizabeth Whitlock was born around 1860. She lived on the intersection of Myers and Syrian Hill Roads. When we first meet her, her name is Mrs. Kelly. She is in competition with Mrs. Gallagher and Mrs. McCormack in obtaining men to room and board in their houses. These were men hired to work at the salt plant. Kindling for a fire was found under Mrs. Gallagher's porch, and Mrs. McCormack's house actually burned. The Justice of the Peace, Mr. Maine, could not find enough evidence to convict, and when he planted a detective (Matt Whitlock) in Mrs. Kelly's house...she married him! When Mrs. Whitlock and her neighbors had an argument over the water from a spring they shared, a bullet whistled past Mr. Mack's head, but again there was not enough evidence to convict. Isn't it odd? Mr. Mack's house burned down shortly thereafter. Mr. Kintz owned the spring in question and when he decided to fence it off, his barn burned down resulting in a loss estimated at \$2,500. This time the Justice of the Peace was Mr. Andrew Conlon. After a lengthy trial in 1917, with numerous witnesses, Mrs. Whitlock was found guilty and sentenced to a term in Auburn Prison. For some reason she never served the term...but... Mr. Conlon's barn burned down! Also two bags of finely chopped kindling wood and a partly burned candle were discovered by Mrs. Conlon under her porch. Other suspicious fires that had occurred in Lansing during this time period were the barn of Clayton Crim, burned at night; the henhouse on the June farm; and the homes of Mrs. Gallagher and Ben Morey. At the time of the trial Mrs. Whitlock said she was 42 years of age but authorities said she was 55 or 60. When she was arranged it was apparent that she had been drinking. She made the statement, they said, that she didn't want to be arrested on arson in the third degree but that it should be first degree, if any. We do not know any more about Mrs. Whitlock or her whereabouts. Perhaps she never served her term in jail because she disappeared from sight.