

TAR AND FEATHERING

IN LINCOLN, VERMONT



"Riding the Rail"

The following chronology of the events in the spring of 1898 that took place in Lincoln Vermont is taken from newspaper articles of the time taking into account what were probably the most accurate reports of the event as they were reported.

Sometime in March 1898 Frank Moore who lived with his brother Irenus Moore on West Hill in Lincoln Vermont went to Burlington for surgical treatment. While he was gone Mrs. Mary Sanders left her home and infant child, came to Lincoln and reportedly hired out to Irenus Moore as his housekeeper. *(Although records from around 1898 list more than one Mary Sanders in Vermont at this time, I believe the Mary Sanders, and wife of Charles Sanders, involved in this affair could have been about 31 years old, from MiddleburyRD)*

Also staying at the home was Hollis Atwood, age 46, nephew of Irenus and Frank Moore. Atwood claimed he was at Moore's at the request of Frank Moore to keep Irenus company.

Soon after Mrs. Sanders moved in Atwood and other young men began to hang around the Moore place, which soon became what was referred to in news reports as a nuisance. It was also alleged that Atwood and Sanders had been making themselves 'obnoxious' to a portion of the people of Lincoln.

On Friday evening April 1, believing Hollis Atwood and Mrs. Mary Sanders were **committing adultery**, ten to fifteen men and boys went to the house and demanded admittance, which was refused. Reports said they were carrying between them a large kettle and one of the men was carrying a gunny sack filled with a 'light substance'. Atwood claimed he and Mrs. Sanders were sitting in the parlor when they heard the gate slam and then footsteps stealthily approaching the house. Atwood said Mrs. Sanders hid in the attic while Atwood, armed with an axe tried to defend her and himself. After a while part of the crowd managed to get inside

the house, but not until windows and doors had been damaged. At some point during the confrontation it was reported that Mary Sanders had put on man's clothes and hid in the cellar, behind a potato bin, where she pelted the crowd with potatoes until both she and Atwood were captured.

Soon after a liberal coat of **tar and feathers** was applied to both Mary Sanders and Hollis Atwood. They were then made to '**Ride the Rail**' to Constable John Beane's home on Lincoln Center Road. *(Note-Tar and Feathering was a form of public humiliation and discomfort, but not serious injury. The "tar" that was used was not the material now most commonly referred to as "tar" which has a high melting point. The "tar" used for 'Tar and Feathering' was usually 'Pine Tar' which has a much lower melting point, some being liquid at room temperature. **Riding the Rail** (also called being "run out of town on a rail") was a punishment most prevalent in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries in which an offender was made to straddle a fence rail held on the shoulders of two or more bearers. The victim was then paraded around town or taken to the city limits and dumped by the roadside*^{RD)}

Soon after arriving at Constable Beane's Atwood reportedly managed to escape. He spent several hours the next day removing the undesirable coating. Atwood said he knew the men engaged in their abduction and that he would bring suit against each one for damages.

Mary Sanders claimed she was barefoot and the ground was frozen when she walked back to the Moore house. On Sunday she was seen at Moore's by a news correspondent who said she was really an object of pity. He reported she was sitting beside the stove with a big revolver in her hand and the house strewn with tar and feathers. The reporter said "...while her wrong doing is perhaps unquestioned she is only one of that vast army of fallen women, and it is understood that some of the crowd of assailants have assisted in her fall. If she deserved tar and feathers, some of the crowd, who were also as guilty as Atwood, also did."

In the weeks following the 'incident' the victims quietly worked to effect a settlement with the parties who supplied the tar and feathers. On Friday May 6, 1898 they succeeded in their efforts. Most of the parties implicated walked up and deposited \$5.00 each in the 'Dough Dish' and, in return, received a paper releasing them from further damages. About \$30.00 was collected.

Over that weekend peace and harmony appeared to prevail, but on early Monday morning May 9, 1898 Constable John Beane showed up at the Moore house and arrested Hollis Atwood and Mrs. Mary Sanders charging them with committing adultery.

He then brought them to the home of Attorney William W. Rider in Bristol Village where they were given a hearing before Justice Cornelius E. Bristol of Lincoln. State's Attorney Frank L. Fish of Vergennes appeared for the State and William W. Rider defended the prisoners.

Called as witnesses, all of whom resided in Lincoln, were Bert Lathrop, Melvin and Austin Baslow, Bert Manning, Irenus Moore and Constable John Beane. Part of these witnesses swore they saw the couple commit the alleged crime.

Irenus Moore, who lived in the house where the alleged crime was committed, proved to be not a very good witness for the prosecution as he was unable to remember anything connected with the case.

A vital point in the case against the pair, the alleged marriage of Mrs. Sanders and her alleged husband, Charles Sanders, was questioned by defense attorney Rider. On this point the state's attorney asked for time to procure proof of the marriage. Justice Bristol granted an adjournment of the hearing for two weeks.

Bail, at first placed at \$100.00 each, was reduced to \$50.00 each. Bail was furnished by Elmer Williams of Lincoln with the exception that Atwood put up \$25.00 cash.

On May 23, two weeks later, the adjourned hearing was reconvened in the adultery case. Justice Bristol considered the evidence presented by State's Attorney Fish and found it sufficient to bind both Atwood and Sanders over to the grand jury. Their bail was set at \$100.00 each. When the two were unable to raise that amount they were taken to Middlebury and committed to the county jail.

After their jailing I could not find any more reports or articles on the outcome of this case.

(Although adultery was more likely to bring a conviction and a prison sentence in the late 1800s and early 1900s than it had been in early Vermont prosecution and conviction for adultery were highly inconsistent. Indictments were often filed and then dropped as "Nolle Prossed" when the prosecutor decided not to prosecute a case. When cases did come to trial, some juries and judges acquitted defendants, while others convicted both men and women and handed out long prison sentences. RD)

I was unable to determine what happened to Mary Sanders, it's possible she ended up in Hartford, Vt. with her husband following this incident, but Hollis Atwood continued to live in Lincoln.

The 1900 and 1910 censuses show Atwood as single, with the occupation of jeweler and watch repairman. He was also known as 'spiritualist' by some. On February 1, 1901 the Middlebury Register reported he had 'delivered a very interesting address on the subject of "Spiritualism" at a residence on the East Middlebury Rd.'

In the 1920 census he was listed as patient at the Waterbury State Hospital.

In his later years he lived for a while on East St. in Bristol where he was often seen walking his cat on a leash.

Hollis Atwood died May 17, 1932 in Ripton, Vermont and is buried in Lincoln, Vt.

Information compiled from:

Vermont Phoenix, April 8, 1898

Herald and News, West Randolph, Vt. April 14, 1898

Bristol Herald April 8, May 12, May 26, 1898

Middlebury Register, May 13, May 27, 1898, February 1, 1901

1900, 1910, 1920 Census Reports

Information supplied by George Smith

(Note- Justice Cornelius E. Bristol was my great, great grandfather RD)

Reg Dearborn
January 2017