

Bringing History Home

by Lynne Belluscio

We've decided that's what we do here at the Historical Society. We bring history home. Or at least we try.

A couple of weeks ago, I found an unusual advertising piece on eBay. It was a little paper puzzle for horse blankets from the Burrit Store on Main Street. I thought I had placed a good enough bid on it, only to lose out by 50 cents. I know the seller and she told me that it was sold to a buyer in Japan! She said that a lot of American ephemera is going to Japan. Bummer!!

The same day, I learned about a pair of very rare daguerreotypes in Nebraska of the 1854 Ingham graduating class. This bidding was not going to be for the faint of heart. There were already 20 bids and the price was over \$500. I contacted the seller and said that I probably would not be the winner of this auction, but would send him a letter explaining the historical significance of the images, the names of the girls – although we don't know who is who, and if the buyer ever wanted to sell the daguerreotypes, to please contact us. To make a very long story short, I was able to buy



Junction house owned by Elizabeth & Lester Colby in Wyndott County, Kansas.

the daguerreotypes and they are now home in LeRoy.

We are doing a lot of research on the 17 girls. Many are not originally from this area, but some are local names, such as Elizabeth Randall. (Randall Road.) And her story has turned out to be fascinating. This is a true story for history detectives and this *Pennysaver* article is just an abbreviated form. If you want to read the whole story, and you're not a member of the Historical

Society, you'll have to join so you can get the next newsletter.

Elizabeth Randall graduated from the Ingham Collegiate Institute in 1854. (It wouldn't become a university until 1857). She was one of seventeen graduates. She married Lester Colby of Perry in Rochester on July 10, 1856. In 1859, they moved to Oskaloosa, Kansas and lived there seven years. During that time he went to Lawrence, Kansas, to help rebuild the town after the southern rebels (during what was called Quantrell's Raid,) had burned the town down. (This was the time of "Bleeding Kansas" when the state was torn apart between slavery and becoming a free state.)

Apparently the Colbys, who were admitted abolitionists, were in the middle of a very dangerous situation. According to her obituary that we found in our files, "She took up her abode immediately after their marriage in the then far Southwest and in the border ruffian country where, being abolitionists and unionists, they were constantly in danger of losing their lives at the hands of rebel sympathizers. ... Many a family in those early pioneer days were sheltered in her home which was directly on the Old Indian Trail still known as the "Shawnee Trail." She mentioned that the walls and woodwork were pock marked with bullets that had come from rebel guns.

Google searches have turned

up a lot of information about the house. I talked with Trish at the Wyndott Historical Society and they are sending additional information and I talked with the real estate company that auctioned the Colby house in 2010. The house, which is known locally as the Junction House, was a stagecoach inn and was built at the junction of the Southern Bridge Road and the Kansas City-Shawnee Town Road in Southern Wyndott County. It certainly has seen better days. According to one source it was a nursing home for a while.

Lester Colby was known as a farmer and horticulturalist. He also worked at a sash and door factory for a while, perhaps while helping in Lawrence.

Lester and Elizabeth Colby had six children, Hiram of Hardesty, Oklahoma; Fenton who lived in the homestead; Mrs. Addie Knott of Fort Worth, Texas; Mrs. Grace Wing of Kansas City; Mrs. Gertrude Gardner of Mexico City; and Frank of San Francisco.

So as I looked at the photographs of his old house that were sent by the real estate company, I couldn't help but wonder, if Lester Colby had made the newel post at the bottom of the stairs, and how many times, Elizabeth had touched that stair rail as she went upstairs. And I wonder which one of the girls in the daguerreotype is Elizabeth.



The newel post in the Junction house.