

## Intrigue in Summit

This is the story about the end of Mrs. Lizzie Oliver's life. She went out for a dozen eggs on New Years Day 1919, never to be heard from again.

I became interested in this story while compiling a database of obituaries from numerous editions of The Middleburgh News. The reason the story caught my eye was that there was very few, what we would call "Real News Stories" in the paper. The Middleburgh News back in the early 1900's (cost \$1 per year or five cents per copy) consisted of town happenings such as who was: visiting friends or relatives, born, married, sick and or passed away. The heading for these columns was "Correspondence News Items Gathered by Our Special Representatives" Some of the towns with columns were: Barnerville, Blenheim, Broome Centre, Cooksburg, Flat Creek, Gridleys Gate, Guinea, Potters Hollow, Preston Hollow, Rensselaerville, West Middleburgh. I have gleaned the information for this story mostly from the seven articles pertaining to Lizzie Oliver's disappearance. There was also mention of Lizzie's disappearance in the The Pheonix (Richmondville newspaper) Charlottesville and Summit town happenings sections, but they were no different than The Middleburgh News.

Mrs. Lizzie Oliver was born in Mayville, Chautaugua County NY in 1833, 37 or 39. (1875 & 1900 Census Records, Summit Township, and death certificate #56) to John MacMere of Ireland or NY and Catherine O'Neil of Canada (Lizzies death cert. #56 in the Summit Town Hall). Three different records listed three possible birth dates. Her name was always listed as Lizzie throughout assorted records except in her son Seymour's death certificate she was listed as Elliza. Lizzie conducted a millinery store in Albany, I assume before ending up in Summit. She was probably married about 1860 as her first child Nelson was born in 1861-62 in Pennsylvania. I did not find a marriage certificate in Summit for Lizzie and Ambrose as they probably married in PA but I did find a previous marriage for Ambrose to Lunny Mott in Clam Hollow/Summit 2/5/1854. Ambrose was living with his mother and younger brother James in the 1855 Jefferson, NY census, but Lunny was not listed. She married Ambrose Oliver (born 1826 in Summit) son of Andrew Oliver born in Otsego County NY (info from Ambrose's death cert) and Elizabeth VanBuren born 1803 in Summit, NY (Info from Ambrose death cert and 1855 census). Lizzie and Ambrose had three children Nelson, Seymore B:1864 Summit and D: 6/1892 of Brights Disease in Summit and John B:1868 Summit and D:3/27/1890 of Typhoid Fever in Summit. Ambrose is listed as a farmer with 90 acres in the 1872 Schoharie County Directory and 120 acres in the 1899 directory. Lizzie was widowed on 12/3/1898 when Ambrose dies of chronic nephritis. Lizzies death certificate does not list a death date but it does list a burial of 6/13/1919 in Lutheranville (part of Summit) NY. Her cause of death was listed as probable exposure.

The following is a synopsis of how The Middleburgh News reported the big mystery in seven articles spreading over the next seven months.

**"A Summit Mystery"** Aged Lizzie Oliver Missing Since January 1<sup>st</sup>, from the 1/30/1919 edition.

Sheriff Oliver (Lizzie's nephew) and District Attorney Mayam went to Summit to investigate Mrs. Lizzie's disappearance a few days ago (so about three weeks after she came up missing, Hum). Her son Nelson informed the sheriff that his mother had not returned home. There were strong suspicions of foul play. There was an ice/sleet storm,

followed by a snow storm on January 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. It is hoped that Mrs. Lizzie will be found along side the road after the two or three feet of snow melts. She was said to be fairly well off but feeble in mind and body in her last years.

**“Summit Mystery Unsolved”** Search For Mrs. Lizzie Oliver Still Continues, 2/16/1919 edition.

Mrs. Lizzie is still missing after much searching by the sheriff, state police and neighborhood folk. On January 1<sup>st</sup> Mrs. Lizzie walked about a mile to the home of George VanBuren to purchase a dozen (cost about .40) eggs. She put the eggs in a basket and left for home about 3:30 in the afternoon. It is supposed that she had about \$50 on her and \$300 in one Cobleskill bank and \$150 in another.

**“The Mystery Deepens”** Disappearing Snow on Summit Hills Fails to Reveal Body, 3/27/1919 edition.

With most of the snow melted, Troopers Cunningham and Leddy organized a search party of “30 men and a boy” last week to look for Mrs. Lizzie Oliver. Hundreds of acres were searched without any results. “What has become of the aged women is the cause of much speculation and baffling wonderment”.

**“Will Begin Investigation”**, 5/1/1919 edition.

Sheriff Oliver and District Attorney Mayham plan to go to Summit and begin an investigation of the death of Mrs. Lizzie Oliver. “John Doe proceedings will probably be instituted”.

**“Special Proceedings at Summit”**, 6/12/1919 edition.

The Sheriff and District Attorney expect to go to Summit this week or next to begin John Doe proceedings.

**“THE SUMMIT MYSTERY IS SOLVED AT LAST”** Body of Lizzie Oliver found at Roadside, 6/19/1919 edition.

A foul smell, not foul play solves the mysterious disappearance of Lizzie Oliver. While driving cows to the barn farmer Fred Collington discovers a badly decomposed odorous body under a hemlock bush within 700 feet of a main road (Charlotte Valley Rd.). The sheriff, district attorney and coroner CF Wharton journeyed to Summit the next day to investigate. “Lizzie’s appearance indicated that she had crawled up under the bush to get out of the storm”. Her basket of broken eggs lay near her body and was only a few rods (about 48 feet) from the Oliver district school house. Teachers and students had complained about a bad odor that frequently permeated the school. Undertaker Germond of Charlotteville took charge of Lizzie’s body and burial in the Lutheranville cemetery (although I don’t find a grave stone for her there). Mrs. Oliver’s estate consisted of 125 acres of land and about \$500 in cash.

**“THEORY OF A CRIME EXPLODED BY FIND”** Money bag of Lizzie Oliver found at last, 7/10/1919.

The sheriff discovers blackened and stained monies totaling \$33.02 in a small gingham cloth bag only 60 feet from where Lizzie was found. Some folks were not totally sold on Lizzie’s death being an accident as her money was still missing. Nelson Oliver, her only child, will no doubt inherit the property but will have to wait for an administrator to be appointed to settle the supposed \$2000 estate.