

The Jagt Murders (1884)

One of the most shocking and heinous crimes in the early settlement of Missaukee was the murder of Jan Jagt and his wife Catalina in March 1884.

Jan Jans Jagt

Jan Jans Jagt was born on 19 Feb 1820 in Scherpenisse, Tholen, Zeeland province, in the Netherlands. He was the seventh and youngest child of Jan Jagt and Neeltje Kraak Jagt, though two of his siblings had died before he was born. His father was a “schippersknecht,” or ship’s servant, by trade.

At age 28, Jan Jans married Jannetje Laban in June 1848. Jannetje already had a daughter, also named Jannetje, whose father is not named, but likely Jan Jagt himself. They soon married and had a son, also named Jan Jans Jagt, three months after the wedding. Two years later, they had a second son, Jacob, but mother Jannetje died two weeks after giving birth, and the infant Jacob also died at five months old.

In June 1854, at age 34 and with two young children, Jan married Johanna Cornelia Vlekke in the town of Poortvliet. That September, they had a son, but he died within a few months. Two years later, in 1856, Johanna gave birth to a daughter, Neeltje. Mother Johanna then died in January 1858, leaving Jan a widower for a second time, now with three living children.

Later that same year, Jan married Catalina Bareman Lems, a widow with two kids of her own.

Catalina Jakobs Bareman Lems Jagt

Catalina Bareman was born on 8 June 1816 in Oud-Vossemeer, in the province of Zeeland, the Netherlands, to Jakob Bareman and Sara Lameer Bareman. She was the youngest of six children, though at least one of her siblings had also died in infancy before she was born. Her father Jakob died when she was 14 years old.

At age 27, she married Maarten Lems, a 31-year-old corn-miller’s servant. Her first wedding was in June 1843 in her hometown. A month later, they had a son, but the infant lived only 14 weeks. Within five years, they had a baby boy, named Jacob, and a girl, Maartje, both of whom live to adulthood. After thirteen years of marriage, Catalina’s husband Maarten died in December of 1856. Catalina was alone with two young children for about a year and a half before, at age 42, she married Jan Jans Jagt in August of 1858.

Immigration to Missaukee

Jan and Catalina and their five kids lived for ten years together as a blended family in the Netherlands. Then they immigrated from Oud-Vossemeer to the United States in August of 1868. She was 52, and he was 48. His occupation was simply “worker” or “laborer,” and their reason for immigrating was listed as “to join family or friends.” The immigration record notes

they had four children with them, though all five of their living children appear thereafter in America.

Perhaps the oldest daughter had immigrated independently, or perhaps the family spent some time in Wayne county, New York, because Jan's oldest daughter, Jannetje Laban Jagt, at about age 20, married Simeon LeRoy circa 1868, the same year the Jagts immigrated. The young couple started a family in Williamson, NY, having seven children there before moving to Grand Rapids around 1881.

Meanwhile, Jan and Catalina headed west to Michigan early on. Just over one year in America, Jan Jagt filed a homestead claim in Missaukee on 17 September 1869.¹¹ Several other Dutchmen filed that same year, including John Meyering, Ralph Veen, Jakob Quist, Cornelius Quist (who was married to Jacoba Bareman, sister of Catalina Bareman Jagt), and John Westdorp. Vogel Center had been founded as the first permanent settlement in Missaukee just over a year earlier in 1868.

While their oldest son, John Jagt, settled in Grand Rapids to make a career in the furniture factories there, Jan and Catalina pursued their homestead claim and pioneered in the Missaukee forests. Jan, Catalina, Jacob, and Neeltje appear together in Missaukee in the 1870 Census, living next door to the Quist family. Catalina's daughter Maartje Lems, at about age 20, likely married Jan Westdorp circa 1870 and then gave birth to a daughter in June of 1871 in Clam Union. Not long after, Jan's daughter Neeltje Jagt, at age 15, marries the boy next door, 19-year-old Anthony Quist, in September of 1872.¹² Jan and Catalina also appear as members of Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church by 1873. Their three younger children, namely, Neeltje Jagt, Jacob Lems, and Maartje Lems, also appear in the church records.

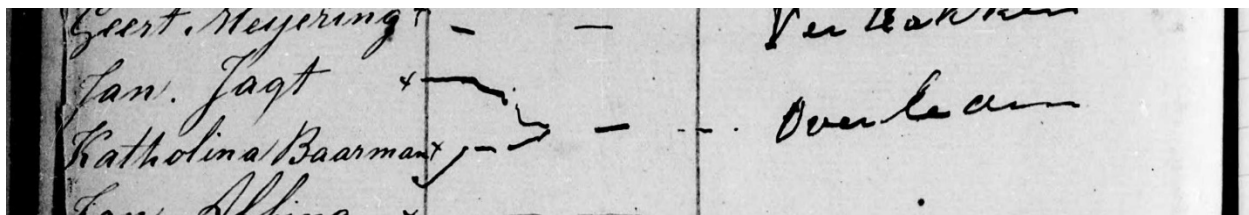


Figure 16: Vogel Center CRC 1873 Membership Roster

A decade later, on 10 June 1880, when the next census was taken, Jan (age 60) and Catalina (age 64) were farming eighty acres in Clam Union township, next door to son Jacob Lems and

¹¹ On Section 10 of Clam Union Township (21N6W), although the precise plot description is crossed out.

¹² When Jacoba Bareman Quist's son Anthony Quist married Neeltje Jagt, because Neeltje's father Jan Jagt had married Jacoba's sister Catalina Bareman Lems on his third marriage, Anthony's aunt became his step-mother-in-law.

daughter Neeltje Jagt Quist and her family of grandkids. Just a month later after the census was taken, son Jacob Lems married Pieterella Hoeflaak on 4 July 1880.

26	Lems Jacob	W	M	32	-	1	1	Farmer	1
27	Jagt Jan	W	M	60	-	1	1	Farmer	1
	Carolina	W	F	64	-	1	1	Keeping House	1

Figure 17: 1880 US Census records

For Jan and Catalina, people who survived the deaths of multiple spouses and children, plus starting over in a permanent immigration to a foreign nation in their middle-age, life in their Dutch-speaking Vogel Center community in the early 1880s probably seemed more stable than ever before, with neighbors, kids, and grandkids all around.



Figure 18: 1906 plat map indicating 1884 locations of Jagt property; circles mark the farm, triangle the retirement home

Sometime in the early 1880s, the Jagts built a new house three-quarters of a mile south of the Clam Union Cemetery.¹³ They likely considered this house their retirement home. Just to the south was the farm owned by daughter Maartje and her husband John Westdorp, along with several grandchildren.¹⁴

¹³ In May 1882, Jan Jagt sold 80 acres of farmland just south of Vogel Center (the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 29 plus the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 32—two 40-acre plots) to a Katherine Linquist for \$200. Oddly, a year later Jan Jagt bought the same land back from Katherine Linquist for \$1,700. This seems to be the land he actually farmed.

¹⁴ As Ken Spoelma records at <http://vogelcenterwebsites.blogspot.com>, the home was located on Koopman road, which intersects E Stoney Corner Road 1.5 miles west of Vogel Center, at the Clam Union Cemetery. Koopman road runs south from the cemetery, past Meyering road and toward the county line. The Jagt home was on the west side of Koopman road, by most accounts about three-quarters of a mile south of Stoney Corners and the cemetery, just north of the current location of a gas well. This would have been directly on John Westdorp's farmland

The Murders

According to newspaper reporting, The Jagts had been to visit their daughter and son-in-law in the afternoon of Saturday, March 1, 1884, and returned home in good spirits. John Westdorp later testified they lived only a few rods from the house and could easily have heard them if

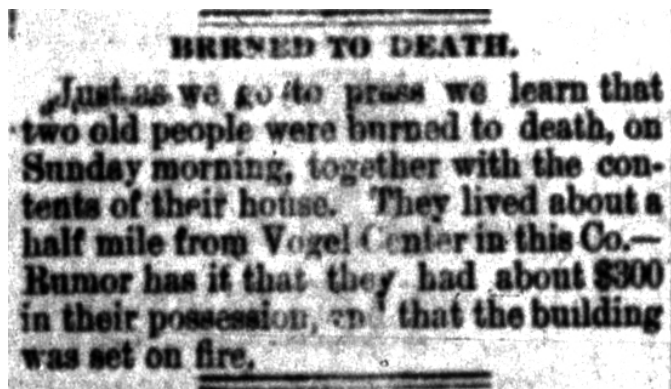


Figure 19: Lake City Journal, 4 March 1884

they had shouted. He said the Jagts regularly went to bed at 9 o'clock, and the night before the murder, the light was on at the Jagts out when he went to bed.

At some point in the night, the house was set ablaze. The fire was seen at some distance around 1 am. But the family and neighbors did not discover the ruin until early morning on Sunday, March 2nd.

The next issue of the *Lake City Journal* on Tuesday, 4 March 1884, reports "Just as we go to press, we learn that two old people were burned to death on Sunday morning, together with the contents of their house. They lived about a half mile from Vogel Center in this co[unty]. Rumor has it that they had about \$300 in their possession, and that the building was set on fire."

324	Nov 24	1883	Rodg Dick	M	W		13	9	6	Clam Union	Deaf blind from Holland Europe	you are	no
325	March 1	1884	John Jagt	M	W	Married	64	0	11	Clam Union	Murdered by his wife	Blind Dick	Clam Union
326	March 1	1884	Catalina Jagt	F	W	Married	67	8	24	Clam Union	Burned to ashes with the contents of the house	Blind Dick	do
327	Oct 2	1883	John Reikels	M	W		6	6	00	Clam Union	Infant murdered by Holland Europe	do	do

Figure 20: Missaukee County Death Record entries for Jan and Catalina Jagt

The county death records state that their deaths were under "suspicion of murder; bodies were burned to ashes with the contents of the house."

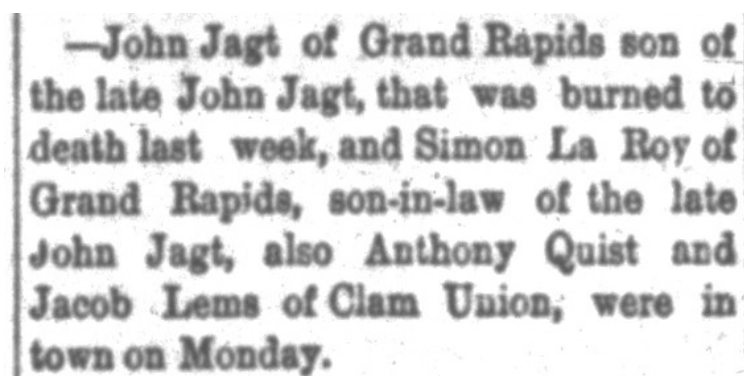


Figure 21: Lake City Journal, 11 March 1884, page 1

A week after the fire, The *Lake City Journal* records that Jan Jagt's son John and son-in-law Simon LeRoy came up from Grand Rapids, presumably for the funerals and to confer with the family.

On March 8th, the county Supervisors called for a special meeting to be held on 18 March 1884 in order to discuss a plan for investigation.

* FROM CLAM UNION.

EDITOR JOURNAL:

On Sunday, March 2, 1884, about 2 o'clock in the morning, the house of John Jagt was burned to the ground, and all of its contents, including Mr. and Mrs. Jagt, who were an aged couple. On the 2d, Mr. Gerrit Vis was notified of the facts; when Justice A. G. Larcom with Gerrit Vis and Wm. Mathews proceeded to the ruins, and on close inspection, came to the conclusion that there had been foul play. As what remained of the bodies were found lying in, or about the center of the setting room, one on each side of where the stove would be were it in position. Seemingly as though they had been knocked out of their chairs, and murdered, and then the house set on fire. The old folks usually went to bed early, and every thing goes to show that they were burned with their clothes on.... The verdict of the coroners inquest was that John Jagt and wife came to their death by some unknown cause. The following named gentlemen composed the coroners jury: A. G. Larcom, Justice; Wm. Mathews, Gerrit Vis, John Kuiper, Romke Vanderheide, John Van de Kreeke, Geo. Myer, jurors. CLAM RIVER.

Figure 22: Lake City Journal, 11 March 1884, page 4

On the back page, the March 11 *Journal* gave the first detailed account. The authorities had declared foul play almost immediately. "What remained of the bodies were found lying in, or about at the center of the setting room, one on each side of where the stove would be were it in position. Seemingly as though they had been knocked out of their chairs, and murdered, and then the house set on fire. The old folks usually went to bed early, and every thing goes to show that they were burned with their clothes on." Other accounts speculated the couple was drugged with sedatives before their deaths to prevent resistance.

The story began to appear in newspapers throughout Michigan just over a week after the fire.

Port Huron's *Times Herald* was the first to report that a relative was under some suspicion, but declined to name any individual.

News has been received of a tragedy in Missaukee county, at a seldom heard of place called Vogel Center. The details are very meager, but from what is learned it appears that an old German couple whose names are known at Ewart, were found dead in the ruins of their home. From the surroundings it is feared that they were murdered for their money, which they had recently drawn from a bank, and that their house had been fired for the purpose of effacing all traces of the crime. A local coroner's jury has arrived at this conclusion in the case, and suspicion is directed toward a relative of the victims.

Figure 23: Port Huron Times Herald, 11 March 1884, page 2

The Detroit *Free Press* recounted that the clock dial was found stuck at 12 o'clock midnight, and the initial inquest "indicated foul play, and by many it is thought John Westdorp, their son-in-law, is supposed to know something of the tragedy. The neighbors are demanding an investigation."

SUPERVISORS PROCEEDINGS.
SPECIAL SESSION.
 Lake City, Thursday, March 8, 1884.
 To the County Clerk of the County of Missaukee: We the undersigned, being one third of the Board of Supervisors of said county do hereby request that you call a meeting of said board to be held at your office on Tuesday, the 18th day of March, A. D. 1884, for the purpose of taking such steps in relation to the supposed murder of the Jagt family, as the law and the circumstances may seem to require.—Gerrit Vis. Peter I. Quick, F. L. Decker, H. Murphy.
 Lake City, March, 18, 1884.
 Board called to order by the chair, and upon the call of the roll by towns the members were all present except Supervisor from Aetna.
 Minutes of last days proceedings were read, and on motion of Supervisor Decker were approved as read.
 Supervisor Decker offered the following resolution:
To the Honorable Board of Supervisors:—
 Resolved, that we do hereby appropriate the sum of \$1000 of the funds of the county or so much thereof as may be required to pay the expenses of a thorough investigation under the direction of the sheriff of this county as the cause of the death of John Jagt and wife late of Clam Union, and the expenses of officers in making investigation. All accounts for services rendered by any county officer to be audited by the board. Orders for said expenses to be drawn by the said sheriff and paid by the county treasurer the same as if audited by this board.
 On motion of Supervisor Vis, the resolution was adopted.
 On motion of Supervisor Decker, the board adjourned until to morrow morning at 8 o'clock.

Figure 24: Lake City Journal, 24 March 1884

A MISSAUKEE TRAGEDY.

A Son-in-Law of an Old Swedish Couple Suspected of Robbery, Murder and Arson.

Special Dispatch to The Detroit Free Press.

EVART, March 11.—On the night of March 1 Mr. and Mrs. Quist were found burned with the house and contents near Vogel Center, Missaukee Co., twenty-seven miles north of Evart. There is suspicion of murder, robbery and arson, although nothing positive has developed to sustain this position. The old people's bones were found one on each side of the stove, evidently burned with their clothes on. The clock dial was found to indicate 12 o'clock. The old people usually retired early. They lived alone and had considerable money. The inquest indicated foul play. John Westdolph, their son-in-law, is supposed to know something of the tragedy. No legal investigation has taken place at last reports. The scene is in a remote county, and few particulars are known. The neighbors are demanding an investigation. All parties being Swedes, the correct names, to commence legal proceedings, are hard to get.

Figure 25: Detroit Free Press, 12 March 1884, page 4

At a special meeting of the county supervisors on March 18, 1884, the board offered up to \$1000 to fund the investigation of the crime. They resolved, "that we do hereby appropriate the sum of \$1000 of the funds of the county or so much thereof as may be required to pay the expenses of a thorough investigation under the direction of the Sherriff of this county as the cause of death of John Jagt and wife late of Clam Union, and the expenses of officers making investigation."

More newspapers picked up the crime story, as far as New York and Illinois.

On the night of March 1, Mr. and Mrs. Quist were found burned with the house and contents near Vogel Center, Missaukee Co., twenty-seven miles north of Exart. There is suspicion of murder, robbery and arson, although nothing positive has developed to sustain this position. The old people's bones were found one on each side of the stove, evidently burned with their clothes on. The clock dial was found to indicate 12 o'clock. The old people usually retired early. They lived alone and had considerable money. The inquest indicated foul play, and by many it is thought John Westdorp, their son-in-law, is supposed to know something of the tragedy. The neighbors are demanding an investigation.

Figure 26: Newspaper article, circa March 1884

The Lake City *Leader*, of last week, contains an account of the burning of dwelling house near Vogel Center, Missaukee county, March 2d, and of the finding of the charred remains of John Jock and wife, the former aged occupants, in the ruins. The fire occurred about one o'clock, Sunday morning; the light having been seen by parties a long distance away. None of the neighbors knew anything of the fire until the next morning. The aged couple had been to visit a son-in-law, living some eighty rods from them, the afternoon previous; and went home in apparent good health. The terrible affair is wrapped in mystery; but there are several things which point strongly to the fact that the aged couple had been murdered early in the evening; the house ransacked and plundered; and then, in the dead hour of the night, when the neighborhood was wrapped in deepest slumber, had set the building on fire to destroy evidence of the crime.

Figure 27: Lake County Star, 13 March 1884

With the Jagts being immigrants from the Netherlands, Dutch-language newspapers in southern Michigan reported the story in some detail.¹⁵ The *De Grondwet* of Holland, Michigan summarized the details known at the time:

“On Sunday, March 3rd, the neighbors of Mr. Jan Jagt and his wife discovered that their house had been consumed by fire at night with the two inhabitants in it, of which nothing was found but a few burnt bones. The husband and wife appear to have sat side by side as they were accustomed to sit, and thus, sitting on the chair, were burned, as it was plainly visible that they had fallen backwards, suggesting that they had been killed first and then the house has been set on fire. This suspicion is further confirmed by the fact that a heap of burnt clothing was found near the woman, more like her usual clothing, and also that the lamp was not found in its usual place. They are thought to have been poured over with oil and then set on fire, and that every lock in the house had been unlocked, indicating that theft must be suspected here, but so far as is known there must have been no more than 12 dollars in the house.

“They had returned home at half past eight that evening from their son-in-law and daughter, Mr. J. Westdorp and his wife, who live on a farm some distance from their house, and as the fire was seen by people living further away at 2 o'clock at night, it is not conceivable that they would have been burned alive.

“It also appears from the clock, which stood still at 11 o'clock, that something must have happened at that time that caused the clock to stop.

“Be that as it may, there is a mysterious veil over this tragedy which may never be lifted. It is true that suspicions arise here and there, as usual, but as they are devoid of all ground, it is no more than guessing and guessing. It is known, Mr. Jan Jagt and wife were quiet, elderly people and were among the first settlers of this place. They had left their farm and built a new wooden house on the land of Westdorp last year.”



Figure 28: *De Grondwet* 5 March 1884

¹⁵ Unfortunately, many of the Missaukee County English-language newspapers of 1885-1886 are missing, so these Dutch sources are some of our best sources of the investigation and eventual trial.

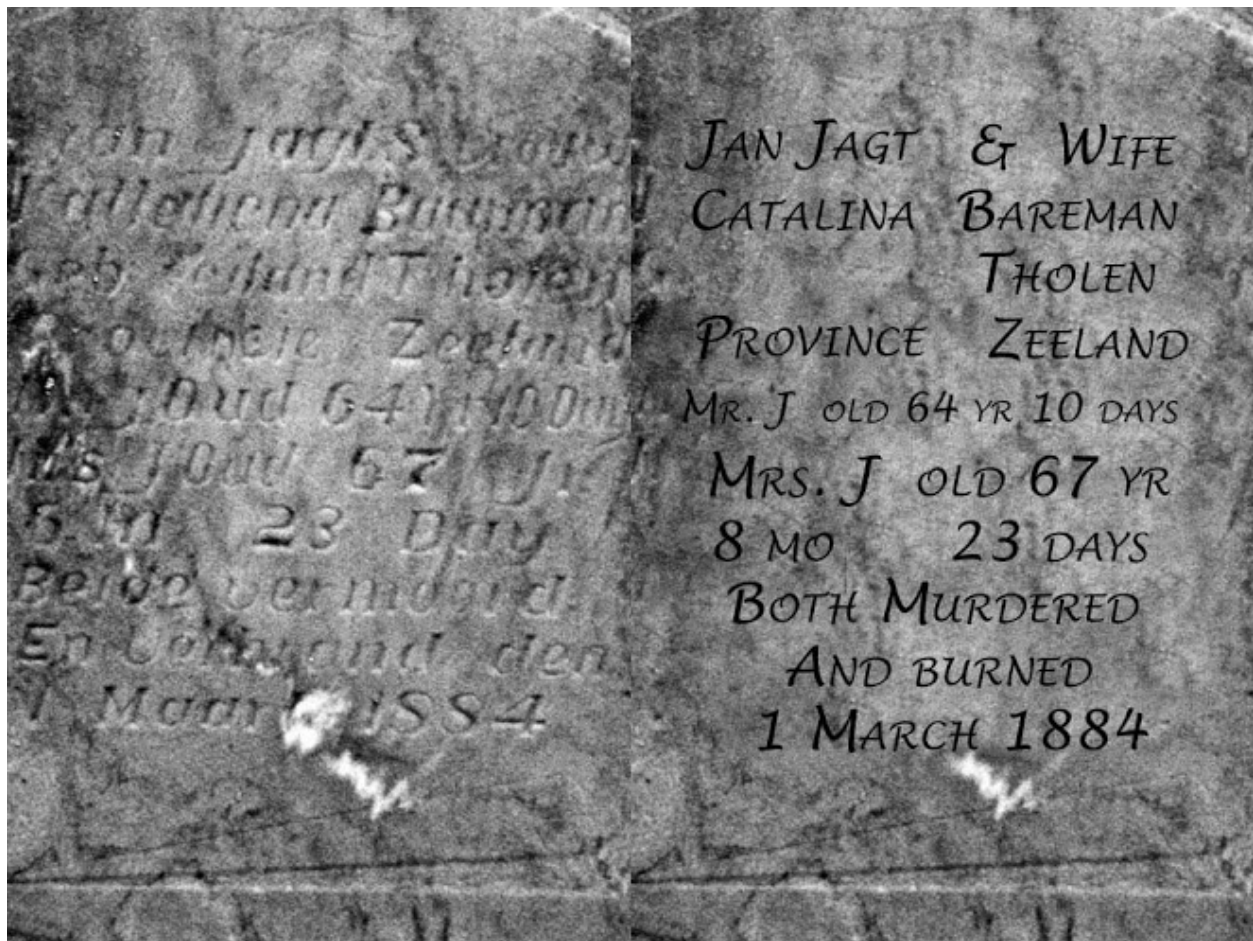


Figure 29: Gravestone with transcription, courtesy of Dale Brinks Photography

Later reporting included more details from the scene, such as “a tin box, with a padlock in front, which was supposed to contain their money, was always in a desk in the sitting room. The broken lock was found where the desk had stood, and the box a considerable distance from it.”¹⁶ Further, “It also appears from the heavy spittoon, which the man [Jagt] used to slide in front of the stove when someone sat in front of the stove, that there was a visitor that evening.”¹⁷

¹⁶ *De Grondwet* 1885-Aug-11

¹⁷ *De Grondwet* 1885-Sep-01

The Suspicions

John Westdorp

Early on, the newspapers printed rumored suspicions of the Jagts' son-in-law, John Westdorp.

Jan "John" Westdorp was born in the province of Zeeland in the Netherlands in 1840. His parents died when he was around 9 years old. He immigrated in his 20s and was one of the early Missaukee homesteaders, filing a claim on the same day as Jan Jagt and Cornelius Quist. All three had roots in the same town back in the Netherlands. Once in Missaukee, they lived as neighbors and, by marriage, had all become relatives by the time of the murders. Westdorp married Catalina Jagt's daughter, Maartje Lems, around 1870, and together they produced at least seven grandkids for the Jagts (and three more after the tragedy). It was their family farm where the Jagts had built their retirement home.

In later court testimony, the source of these rumors and accusations against John Westdorp emerged as a man named William Arnold. Arnold claimed to know who the murderer was and pointed the finger at Westdorp.

William Arnold

Arnold came from Orient, Maine, a town on the New Brunswick Canadian border, but was possibly born around 1836 in New York.¹⁸ Someone from Maine named William Arnold served in the Civil War, but the evidence is unclear if this is the same man who later moved to Missaukee. In Maine, after the Civil War, Arnold married a divorced mother of six, Abigail Longley Peters, who was ten years his senior. Together, Arnold and his first wife had a son, Bertrand William Arnold, in 1868. In 1870, they all lived together as a blended family in Orient, Maine. But shortly thereafter, Arnold left his family in Maine and moved to Michigan. In 1878, he married Marcella Ellsworth Rowell, who was from Gratiot County.

Born in Ontario, Marcella had also been previously married. Around age 35 (circa 1872), she had married Thomas Rowell, a widower with two grown sons, in Gratiot. Marcella and Thomas had a stillborn son in 1873. A year later, Marcella's husband Thomas died in 1874, leaving her as a widow at age 37. Her two adult stepsons were living in Yates County, New York. Her husband Thomas had owned a 40-acre farm in Fulton township in Gratiot, presumably their home. The farm was valued at \$600 in his estate, which, along with some tools, totaled \$967 after his death. The sons each received \$5, and Marcella apparently received the balance. Marcella soon left her extended family in Gratiot County and moved to Lake City, though her reason for doing so, beyond grief, is unknown.

Four years after being widowed, Marcella married William Arnold in Missaukee's Riverside township in July 1878, officiated by E.F. Norton, Justice of the Peace. Nelson and Sarah Norton

¹⁸ Arnold reports his birth as 1836 in New York on the 1870 US Census, which is the earliest known document that states Arnold's birthdate. In 1870, he was living with his first wife in Maine.

were witnesses, and Arnold lists his occupation as “cook.” After a couple years, Arnold filed a land claim in 1880 for a homestead about a mile and a half SSW of Vogel Center.

By 1884, Arnold ran a small hotel, apothecary, and possibly a post-office at Vogel Center. He was rumored to have helped build the Jagts’ new home and to have been somewhat familiar with their dealings.

A few weeks after the fire, as the newspapers were spreading the insinuations, Westdorp received an extortion letter. The threatening letter was addressed from Pokagon Township in Cass County:

"Pokagon, March 13, 1884. Mr. Westdorp, Sir: I am acquainted with the whole matter of your father-in-law's murder. At first, I was there as a vagabond between 12 and 1 o'clock, please let me know what I must do, as I would not like to displease you, as I know all that you did that night. Send your reply to H. J. Morgine, Cass County. P. S. Let me hear from you when I receive it."

Westdorp testified that soon after receiving the letter, when he happened to visit Arnold’s pharmacy for medicine, Arnold asked him about the letter. “Westdorp informed him of the contents, and said that he had written to Morgine: ‘If you were at my house at midnight, why did you not wake me?’ Arnold told Westdorp that he was spoken of badly and that he should have sent Morgine \$150 or \$200 to silence him, and offered to lend Westdorp this money.”¹⁹

Questions began to arise concerning Arnold’s activities. Some noticed that he suddenly had money to lend, rather than continually seeking loans.²⁰

Shortly after the murders, Coroner Gerrit Vis gave William Dezun a letter on the matter to be taken to the Deputy Sheriff at Vogel Center. Dezun could not find the Deputy Sheriff, and so he gave the letter to Arnold, perhaps at the hotel post office, that he might pass it on to the Deputy. This letter was never seen again, but it was not immediately missed.

Jake Quist recounted in a 1972 newspaper a family story that, “Arnold gave great-grandad a sniff of something in a bottle. The odor was so unusual that it made people suspicious.”

More concerning was Arnold’s supposed knowledge regarding the murders. According to court testimony, well after bedtime on the night of the murder, a hotel guest had witnessed Arnold leave his establishment in Vogel Center with a lantern, heading in the direction of the Jagts.

In the following weeks, to explain this behavior, Arnold shared with several people that, the night of the murders, he had experienced a disturbing vision in which he saw the crime happen.

¹⁹ *De Grandwet*, 6 Oct 1885, p4; *Detroit Evening News*, 2 Oct 1885, p3.

²⁰ *Osceola Evart Review*, 9 October 1885, p8.

Arnold and his wife Marcella had invited Otto Herweijer and his wife over for coffee, for example. Over refreshments, Arnold related that he had been born “with a veil over his face” that allowed him to see visions. Arnold claimed that, on the night of the murders, he was jolted awake, pulled two revolvers from the drawer, and cried out that he was unable to see the room he was in. Rather, he saw Westdorp first kill his parents-in-law with a shovel and then set the house on fire. Upon recovering his senses, Arnold claimed he was so disturbed by this apparition that he had fled into the night with his lantern to inspect the Jagts’ home, but got only as far as the cemetery, where he could see the house aflame. He wanted to help, but he could not go further due to the heavy snow.²¹

The Dutch newspapers suggest that people believed Westdorp more than Arnold, and yet that did not stop other newspapers from reporting the rumors, nor did the investigation make a lot of progress for over a year.

Eventually, when Westdorp came to know that Arnold was the source of these accusations. He filed a civil suit of defamation against Arnold and swore out a warrant for his arrest on June 11, 1885.²² Arnold was forced to pay a \$100 surety that he would appear before the County Court on August 10, 1885, to face these charges, 18 months after the murders.

The local correspondent for *De Grondwet* noted that, as the August trial approached, Arnold had been increasingly addicted to alcohol and believed every stranger to be secret sleuth of the police out to entrap him.

The Arrest

Two weeks before the scheduled slander trial, Marcella Arnold went to the judge on Thursday, the 30th of July, with a request to receive the \$100 bond back as cash in exchange for a proof of mortgage on their real estate. This request aroused serious suspicions in the judge; he discerned the Arnolds were gathering cash in preparing to flee the area, and so issued a warrant for William Arnold’s arrest.

On Sunday, August 2, 1885, Sheriff McBain went to Arnold's house to arrest him. Marcella claimed her husband was away to look for land. A careful search found him hidden between the livery barn and the dunghill. He was armed with the two loaded revolvers.²³ He was captured and taken to the county prison in Lake City.

On Tuesday, August 4, 1885, he underwent preliminary hearing before Justice of the Peace Stout at Lake City. Attorneys J.L. McClear and F.O. Gaffney presented the charges, and the accused was defended by Cadillac attorneys McIntyre and Dunham. Presumably, by this point the charges had been escalated to suspicion of the murder itself. After the interrogation,

²¹ *De Standaard*, 9 Oct 1885; *Detroit Evening News*, 29 Sep 1885, p3.

²² *Missaukee Sentinel*, 1 Sep 2006 p5B

²³ According to Jake Quist’s 1972 memoir

because the time was now too short for the 10th of August, Arnold's case was referred to the next Circuit Court hearing in September.²⁴

The Trial

On Tuesday, September 29, 1885, the trial commenced with jury selection. Seventy-four jurors were called, with the final 12 chosen described as sensible people who "inspire complete confidence in everyone."²⁵ Arnold was described as "about 40 years old, small in person and weighs about 150 pounds. His face is bronze and clean-shaven except for a thin mustache. His head is somewhat bald, forehead broad, eyes small and black. He seems to be very nervous and spits incessantly. He doesn't look like he's going to kill."²⁶

Over the next several days, the trial proceeded with twenty-five witnesses testifying. They detailed the crime scene as the coroners found it at the Jagt homestead and the subsequent behaviors of Arnold amongst his neighbors. All the pieces of the story were laid out for the public. Arnold, in his defense, denied having visions and spreading the rumors.

Martin Modders was the local correspondent for the Grand Rapids paper *De Standaard*, in which he later detailed his first-hand account. "There was dead silence in the courtroom as the last attorney of the prosecution delivered his case before the people, and all eyes were on him and the accused. Wm. Arnold and his wife sat seemingly calmly, listening to all this. Only God knows what was in Arnold's heart. Prosecutor Brown wanted to declare Arnold *guilty*, but he wanted justice, as does every mortal, to be upheld."²⁷

With testimony having begun on Wednesday, September 30th, the jury had listened for five days before being dismissed to their deliberations at 4pm on Saturday, October 3. The Circuit Court Judge, Silas S. Fallass, of Cadillac,²⁸ delivered a short speech to the jurors, who then retired to a separate room. The general opinion was that the jurors would not agree to declare Arnold guilty. Some felt the case was entirely circumstantial.

The jury returned seven hours later, at 11pm Saturday evening. The jury's foreman read out their verdict, declaring they had found William Arnold guilty of the murders of Jan and Catalina Jagt. Three jurors wept like children. Judge Fallass asked Arnold if he wished to make a

²⁴ The 11 Aug and 1 Sep 1885 issues of *De Grondwet* detail the arrest.

²⁵ *The Missaukee Sentinel*, 1 Sep 2006, lists the jurors as George W Paintin, John Thorp, William Eaton, Edgar Blaisdell, Wiliam Klecker, James White, Bert Stimpson, Hervey Cronkite, William Hollings, Amos Cantin (foreman), Marvin Eden, and Samuel B Ardis.

²⁶ *De Grondwet*, 6 Oct 1885, p4, Holland Michigan; this issue covers the first part of the trial.

²⁷ *De Standaard*, 9 Oct 1885, Grand Rapids

²⁸ Fallass was a judge in the 28th judicial circuit from 5 Apr 1882 – 31 Dec 1887 according to Peterson, William R., *The View from Courthouse Hill*, 1972, p394. As an interesting point of trivia, in 1877, Fallass had filibustered the Wexford County board of supervisors by reading aloud the US Constitution, The Michigan Constitution, and starting in on the law code of Michigan. His goal was to speak for three days until the general election, all to prevent a scheme of some county supervisors to create new townships and thus stack the board with votes in favor of the town of Sherman, rather than Cadillac, as the Wexford County seat (Peterson 206).

statement but received no answer. Arnold was then returned to the Lake City prison. Marcella Arnold was taken to the Lake City Hotel.

Martin Modders attempted to see Arnold at the prison yet that night, about 1am, but Sheriff Gillis McBain turned him away for the night.

[Jailhouse Surprises](#)

Modders returned the next morning and, along with a couple others, was able to speak with Arnold, who was allowed to move about within the jail. "As soon as he saw me, he came to the barred door. He asked me what I thought about the jury finding him guilty. My answer was the same as what the public thought.... Arnold said to me in broken Dutch and half German: 'Martin, God and his son Jesus know that I am not guilty, but it will come true, if I have to pay the penalty for this murder, that I will suffer it for another. I am not guilty, another did it; but keep to yourself what I have told you.'" Arnold then asked Modders to summon Marcella, which he did.

Marcella visited the prison that Sunday and brought her husband some whiskey. The libation appears to have encouraged Arnold to share more of his story. Rumors circulated about town through the day that Arnold professed his innocence and accused another.

At 7pm on Sunday, October 4, Arnold told the sheriff that he wished to confess what he knew of the murder. He was brought to the Attorneys' room in the courthouse and swore an oath before several lawyers and Sheriff McBain. Arnold admitted he was there at the Jagts' that night, but he claimed he neither committed the crime nor prevented it. Rather, he accused a man named Andrew Larcom as the murderer.²⁹

Andrew Gillette Larcom was born in New York in 1832 and would have been age 52 in 1884. He had married Celestia Roat in Indiana in 1856, and they had three children, including Jerry Larcom in 1862. But by 1870, Celestia was a patient in the Michigan Insane Asylum in Kalamazoo. In 1872, Larcom remarried, to Katherine Slagel of Colfax, Wexford County. They had four children together through the 1870s. In 1880, they were all living together as a blended family in Cherry Grove in Wexford County, and Larcom listed his occupation as a carpenter. Apparently by 1884, Andrew Larcom and his son Jerry, who was 21 at the time of the murders, were working in Falmouth. Notably, in March of 1884, A.G. Larcom was in fact a lead coroner in the investigation of the Jagt murders, and thus was intimately involved with the case early on.³⁰ After Arnold was arrested in 1885, Larcom had "been active in his effort to secure

²⁹ The name appears misspelled as "Larcon" or "Lacrow" in newspaper accounts.

³⁰ There is no evidence other than a rumor that the killer knew the Jagts, but perhaps these carpenters had a hand in constructing the Jagts' retirement home. They seem a more likely to have carpentry skills than William Arnold. Knowledge of the building may explain why Larcom was chosen as a lead coroner to investigate the ruin.

witnesses on behalf of the accused, and this aroused suspicion in the minds of some persons," so he seems to have been a friend to Arnold.³¹

Arnold alleged that, two days before the murders, A.G. Larcom and his son Jerry had come to Arnold's pharmacy in Vogel Center to buy some chloroform and they plotted the murder there. Then, on that Saturday night, the Larcoms came from Falmouth to Arnold's house and knocked on the door in pre-arranged manner to signal Arnold. Arnold said Larcom "came into my house; I lent him my lantern, and we went together to Jan Jagt's house." Arnold had stopped short at the Jagts' door while Larcom went in and covered Jagt's nose with a rag of chloroform. Mrs. Jagt was on her knees and begged Arnold to come to her husband's aid, but to no avail. Arnold continued, "I was outside. He held chloroform under their nose at first, but it wouldn't work. Then he hit Jagt on the head with a shovel. I heard Jagt say when I was outside: 'My God, why do you do that!' And that was the last thing Jagt uttered." Arnold said Larcom knocked them unconscious with the chloroform and then beat them to death with a shovel. He then stole \$2,200 from the Jagts' cashbox. "Plenty of money was there in Jan Jagt's case. [Larcom] wanted to give me \$150, but I wouldn't take such blood money." Arnold claimed that Larcom "threw kerosene over Mr. and Mrs. Jagt and set their bodies on fire." Afterwards, Arnold "did not see the killer again until four days after the murder was committed; Mr. Larcom came into my house and wanted to give me money." Arnold further confessed, "I was not born with a veil. The killer was the only person who put that veil over my head, just to set himself free and put the blame on Mr. John Westdorp. Westdorp did not commit the murder; I wish John Westdorp was here tonight, I would give him my hand. He hasn't done it. I have never hated Jan Westdorp." Arnold ultimately demurred, "I don't expect any other investigation, I'm definitely going down the road to Jackson [prison]."³²

The next morning, Monday, October 5, 1885, Sheriff McBain arrested A.G. Larcom at Falmouth and brought him to Lake City for questioning. Some reports suggest Larcom and Arnold spent some time together in the jail that day.³³

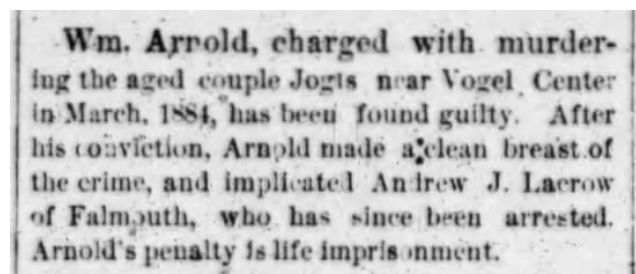


Figure 30: Livingston County Daily Press, 15 October 1885

³¹ Osceola *Evart Review*, 9 October 1885, p8.

³² The jailhouse confessions are described in *De Grondwet*, 13 October 1885, p4, Holland, Michigan and Martin Modders first-hand account in *De Standaard*, 9 October 1885, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

³³ Some newspapers suggest Larcom was arrested Sunday night and he and Arnold spent the night together in jail, but Modders' first-hand account seems more reliable.

The circuit court was still in session, processing other cases, and Arnold had yet to be sentenced. With Arnold and his wife in the courtroom, Arnold's lawyers petitioned for a renewed investigation, even as they discounted Arnold's jailhouse testimony. His lawyer said that Arnold recanted all of Sunday's confession on the grounds that he was under the influence of liquor administered to him by his wife, and thus his confession and implication of the Larcoms was not trustworthy.

—The murder trial of Arnold closed at Lake City Monday. Arnold confessed that he, with Andrew J. Larcon and son, Jerry Larcon, went to the house. Arnold said he watched while the others killed Jagth and wife with a shovel, took \$2,150, and set fire to the house. Arnold then made another affidavit, denying his statement implicating Larcon and son, and Larcon was released. Arnold and Larcon occupied the same cell Sunday night. Arnold was sentenced to solitary confinement at Jackson for life. Attorneys argued a motion for a new trial, but it was denied.

Figure 31: *Grayling Avalanche*, 15 October 1885, p1

Judge Fallass did not allow a new investigation but did invite Arnold to make a statement prior to sentencing. Arnold declared, "I am innocent, my conscience clear. I am fearless of my God

and Savior. Time will tell that I, William Arnold, am not guilty and that another person has committed the murder...I'm innocent."

S. Behind his barn, Arnold has been on trial for a week or more, and the jury returned a verdict of murder in the first degree, last Saturday night, whereupon he made confession to the killing, and implicated one Larcon. Arnold says that O. G. Larcon killed the old man Jagth with a shovel, and that he then killed Mrs. Jagth. They then saturated the bodies with kerosene and set fire to them, the house also being destroyed. The object was robbery. The sheriff arrested Larcon Monday, and placed him in jail. The confession contains some startling charges but the accusations made are accepted as true by those acquainted with the circumstances. Since the arrest of Arnold Larcon has been active in his efforts to secure witnesses in behalf of the accused and this aroused suspicion in the minds of some persons, but the prominence of Mr. Larcon, and the good character born by him hitherto, made the charge hard to accept. Arnold has been sentenced to Jackson State prison, for life. It is now reported that he retracts his confession and makes affidavit that the statements he made were not true.

Figure 32: *Osceola Ewart Review*, 9 October 1885, p8

The Judge, after a short and succinct speech, pronounced the following sentence on Arnold: "Arnold, you are found guilty of the murder; your sentence is forced labor for life, in the jail at Jackson." Arnold received his sentence calmly and apparently without fear. He still maintained his innocence after the sentencing and said that in the day of judgment all would hear that he was innocent.

Larcom was subsequently released.

According to prison records, William Arnold arrived at Jackson prison within the week, on Thursday, October 8.

The results of the trial were widely reported and repeated in various newspapers.³⁴

³⁴ The Paw Paw *True Northerner* and the Holland *City News* carried the same story as the *Avalanche*.

Aftermath

Jan Jagt's heirs, with Jane LeRoy being the eldest and representative, had already sold the farmland south of Vogel Center to son-in-law Anthony Quist for \$520 on 28 April 1885.

Arnold had owned a farm, but sold it in 1886 to Rompke VanderHeid, a relative to the Hoekwater family. Arnold listed his present address as Jackson, Michigan.

Arnold's wife Marcella sold the hotel in Vogel Center to Jan & Grietje Koster. Marcella returned to Gratiot county to live near her family. She never remarried, and she died in Gratiot in March 1906.

Henry Koster recalled in his memoirs, "My folks bought a rooming house [in Vogel Center] from a lady whose husband had been convicted of murdering an old couple who were reputed to have a hoard of wealth in their home.... He also was said to have been in with a ring of horse thieves who stole horses further south and sent them by relays to the frontier."

The famous Vogel murder of Mr. and Mrs. Jagt is still horrifying to the residents of Vogel Center, even though it happened in 1884.

A youngster in the group, Jake Quist, said his great-grandfather worked with the accused murderer, Arnold, at the time of the tragedy. It seems Arnold and another man built the home in which the Jagts were murdered and their home burned.

Jake said, "Arnold gave great-grandad a sniff of something in a bottle. The odor was so unusual it made people suspicious. Arnold sneaked off and hid under the delivery stable. He had two six shooters with him when he was captured."

The deed to Willred Hoekwater's farm bears the signature of William Arnold whose address was Jackson in 1886. The farm was purchased from Arnold by Rompke VanderHeid, a great-great uncle of Willie Hoekwater.

Figure 34: Newspaper article from 12 Aug 1972



Figure 33: Arnold's Vogel Center Hotel, sold to the Koster family

The stolen money, if it existed, was never found. Henry Koster recalled that someone came looking for it:

One evening, after we had moved in [to the hotel formerly Arnold's], a man drove up and asked for lodging. He arose very early the next morning and went for a long walk. After he returned, he informed my folks that he had served time and became acquainted with [Arnold], who gave him a map to show where he had buried a large sum of money. He showed them the map and asked them about a landmark mentioned in the map, and they helped him figure it out. He stayed for a couple days and departed, without divulging if he found anything. Evidently, he gave some information (for a price) to the owner of the property because the latter proceeded at once to plow up and dig a large plot of land, but evidently it was a hoax.

The funds appropriated by the County Supervisors for the investigation back in March 1884, however, went into the pocket of the sheriff with too little accountability for the local Dutchmen. *De Grondwet* reported that, when the \$1000 was approved, “the Sheriff was also authorized (there was haste) to get this money and use it as he saw fit. The Sheriff, an American of the real kind, as the Parisians would say, collected the money and simply put it in his own pocket and did not even consider it worth the trouble to issue an expense report on it. So those thousand dollars have flown and the people of this county have been badly fooled. If a reward had been offered for the discovery of the guilty, as is more often the case, it would have been better, but Supervisors are not so astute as lawyers and statesmen, and certainly thought the Sheriff was an honest man.”³⁵

A.G. Larcom lived another three decades in northern Michigan, dying in 1913 in Traverse City. All his children were in the area at the time of the trial, and as adults some moved out west, some to Florida. His second wife Katherine died in 1903 in Florida. Son Jerry went on to marry in 1888, have a family of three sons. Sadly, his wife Elnora died in 1900 at age 29. Their middle son, Eben, was killed by a brain injury from a baseball at age 18 in 1911 in Wexford County. Jerry's oldest son, Clyde, died of Typhoid Pneumonia a few years later in 1915. Jerry was survived only by his youngest son, Clyde, along with his wife three daughters, when Jerry died in 1934 at age 71.

³⁵ *De Grondwet*, 1 September 1885.

SERIAL	3636	Arnold, Wm.		
NAME	Wm. Arnold	F.P.C.	NO PRINTS	
R. N.		AGE	56	Wt. 151 Ht. 5.1 $\frac{1}{2}$
ALIAS		EYES	HAIR	
		BUILD	OCCUP.	Cook
		RES.		
CRIME	Murder	SENTENCED	10-3-1885	TERM Life
RECEIVED	10-3-1885	FROM	Missaukee Co.	
REMARKS	Died in Hosp 3-23-1909. 8:20 a.m.			

Figure 35: Prison record for William Arnold in Jackson Prison

William Arnold spent the rest of his life in Jackson Prison as prisoner #3636. He applied for and was denied parole in 1899.³⁶

He lived to the reputed age of 80 and was supposedly the oldest prisoner in Jackson prison at the time of his death, though he was probably 73.³⁷

He died in the Jackson prison hospital, at 8:20am on 23 March 1909. His death certificate listed the cause of death as "old age & paralysis," with little known by prison officials about his relatives, as he'd been in prison for nearly 25 years.

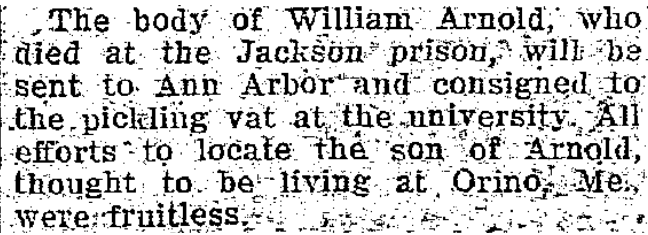
Older Is Dead.
 (Special to The Evening Press.)
 Jackson, March 23.—William Arnold, the oldest inmate of the state prison, is dead at the age of eighty years. He came to the institution in 1885 on a life sentence for murder from Missaukee county.

Figure 36: Grand Rapids Press, 23 March 1909

³⁶ Detroit Free Press, 28 Sep 1899, p7.

³⁷ Arnold's birth year varies by over ten years in the various records over time. His Missaukee marriage records have him born about 1839, but his prison records have him born in the 1820s. On the 1870 Census, the oldest confidently known record, Arnold lists his birth year as 1836.

In one last strange twist to this story, William Arnold's body was "sent to Ann Arbor and consigned to the pickling vat at the university."³⁸ The reasons for doing so are unclear, though perhaps his body was submitted for scientific research.



The body of William Arnold, who died at the Jackson prison, will be sent to Ann Arbor and consigned to the pickling vat at the university. All efforts to locate the son of Arnold, thought to be living at Orino, Me., were fruitless.

Figure 37: Washtenaw county's *Saline Observer*, 1 April 1909, p2

William Arnold's son, Bertrand William Arnold, having grown up without his father in Maine, had married in 1903 at age 35. He may or may not have ever received notice of his father's death, as by 1910 the couple had moved to Los Angeles and prison officials reported they had failed to locate relatives. Bertrand and wife were back in Maine by 1920. Bertrand Arnold died in 1939 at age 70, and never had children. His wife Edna died in January 1943. Thus, William Arnold has no known living descendants.

³⁸ Washtenaw county *Saline Observer*, 1 April 1909, p2.