



she...perpetrated or conspired the base theatrical attack is too vile, too dastardly, to deserve characterization...[W]herever the deserved brand of condemnation may fall, it will not be upon her.

Although he would later deny it, the local press also claimed that he referred to his son as a “recreant sot.”

Regardless of what may or may not have been said, the grand jury was unable to find any direct evidence linking Jim to the crime, and all charges against him were dropped. Louis Mitchell was accused of being the sole instigator. However, the jury was unable to agree on a verdict when the case went to trial in 1905. A second trial was held later the same year, and in a move rather unusual when a black man was accused, the jury acquitted him of all charges. The case would soon be forgotten. Louis Mitchell faded into obscurity. Judge and Mrs. Mulligan lived the rest of their days at Maxwell Place, leaving this earth within ten days of each other in 1915.

CAROLINE TURNER

The story of Caroline Turner has been forgotten by all but a few local historians. She commands only a few lines in the *Lexington Herald*, but history books refer to her in connection with one “of the most gruesome episodes” in the city’s history.

Caroline Augusta Sargent was born in Brownsville, Pennsylvania, in 1795. Her father was Winthrop Sargent. Part of a once wealthy shipping family, the Harvard-educated Winthrop fought in the Continental army during the American Revolution, receiving a commendation from none other than George Washington. After the war, finding his family fortune lost and facing various health problems, Winthrop was a founding member of the Ohio County Association, formed to settle the Northwest Territories. He also served as the acting governor of the territories. In 1789, he married Rowena Tupper, but she died in childbirth the following year.

Sarah Chapese was a New Jersey woman with a fierce Irish temper. Although married to a doctor, they separated and reunited several times. It is uncertain how she met Winthrop—it may have been through Winthrop seeking medical treatment from her husband. Whatever the case, letters



from Winthrop to his sister indicate a series of meetings with Sarah, and by early 1795 she had moved in with him at his home in Cincinnati. The main impetus for their cohabitation appears to have been the fact that Sarah was pregnant. From the outset, the relationship was not a happy one; Sarah's temper and their different backgrounds caused ongoing tension. Arguments were a frequent occurrence even before Caroline was born at the end of the year.

The events of the next few years are vague. Winthrop repeatedly sought custody of the young Caroline. His sister, Judith, offered to care for her, but Sarah refused to hear of such a thing. Letters from Winthrop to Judith indicated that the relationship between he and Sarah had completely dissolved and that he was concerned that the child was suffering as a result.

In 1798, Winthrop moved to Natchez, Mississippi, and was appointed governor of the Mississippi territory. A few months later, he married a local widow, Mary McIntosh Williams. Still, he tried in vain to gain custody of Caroline from Sarah, who had also remarried by this time.

Finally, in 1802, Winthrop gained custody of Caroline, then seven years old. Records claim that she had been subjected to "uncommon calamities." Although there is no indication what these might have been, there is reason to speculate that drinking and violence on Sarah's part, as well as general neglect, may all have been a part of the young girl's childhood. The next fifteen years are largely undocumented. Did Caroline live in Boston with her aunt Judith? Or did she live in Natchez with her father's new family? Perhaps it was a combination of both.

On September 24, 1817, Caroline married Fielding Lewis Turner. Born in Virginia, Fielding Turner had moved to Lexington in 1786 at the age of twenty. He became the deputy clerk of Fayette County in 1796 and was admitted to the bar a few years later. In 1806, he moved to Natchez and later to New Orleans, where he owned a prosperous mercantile business and fought in the Battle of New Orleans. It is likely that Fielding met Caroline in Natchez. What is not known, however, is if her father knew that the marriage would take place. Winthrop and Fielding were firmly placed on opposite sides of the political fence, and the father most certainly did not approve. To Winthrop, his daughter's marriage was tantamount to treason. His new will in 1818 made no mention of Caroline; she was disinherited. Whether her marriage to an opponent of her father's was the result of youthful folly or



an act of revenge for a painful childhood is lost to history. We do know that Caroline never reunited with the Sargent family. Winthrop died in 1820 on his way to Philadelphia, his sister Judith one month later.

Caroline's childhood was certainly not a happy one, and sadly, married life had its share of tragedies, too. The newlywed couple lived in New Orleans, where business prospered. Fielding was also appointed a criminal court judge. While living in Louisiana, Caroline gave birth to five children: James died at the tender age of one month and baby Caroline at sixteen months.

And so it was that in 1827, the family moved to Judge Turner's family farm in Lexington. The judge took up a position as trustee at Transylvania University, equal in reputation to Harvard at the time. Perhaps a new start would bring new fortune and happiness for Caroline. The young Mrs. Turner seems to have made a good impression in Lexington society, with one historian commenting: "Mrs. Turner was a lady of great beauty and vivacity...She was well educated, and accomplished, and dressed with great richness and taste."

A son, Fielding Jr., was born sometime after their arrival in Lexington. He also passed away, at the age of eleven months. Even more tragically, Lucius, aged two, and the six-month-old Augustus both died on the same day in 1833. Caroline Turner buried five of her eight children before their third birthdays.

Such loss would have taken its toll on any woman, and Caroline was no exception. Rumors of cruelty toward her slaves began to circulate, a cruelty that "violated even Kentucky standards" according to historian Jean Baker. Many have claimed that her vicious temper was the reason Fielding never sought higher political office. In 1837, while whipping a young slave boy, she became so enraged that she flung the child from a second-story window. Miraculously, the boy survived, but he was left severely crippled. After this, her husband apparently had her forcibly committed to the Lexington Lunatic Asylum, but she was released a few days later when doctors concluded that there was nothing wrong with her. A letter, dated 1839, from John Clarke of New York, discussed Mrs. Turner and his own recent trip to Lexington:

I repeatedly heard, while in Lexington, Kentucky, during the winter of 1836-7, of the wanton cruelty practiced by this woman upon her slaves, and that she had caused several to be whipped to death, but I

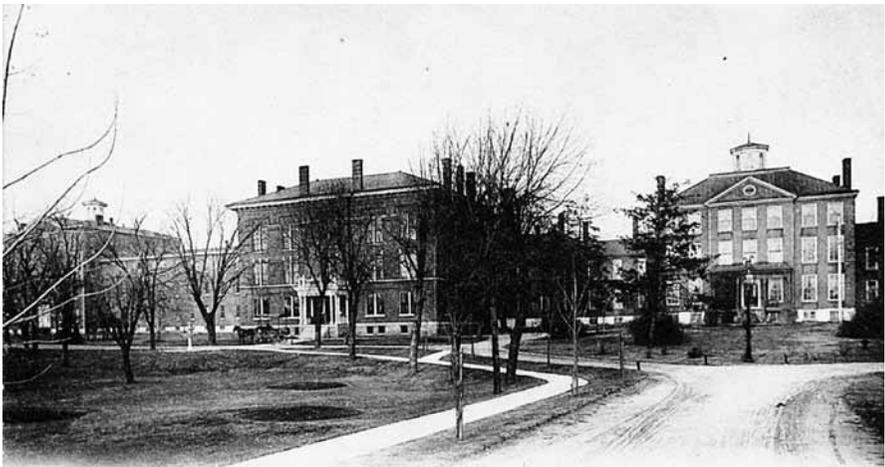
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never heard that she was suspected of being deranged, otherwise than by the indulgence of an ungoverned temper, until I heard that her husband was attempting to incarcerate her in the Lunatic Asylum...I heard the testimony on the trial...and no facts came out relative to her treatment of her slaves...Some days after...I was present in my brother's office, when Judge Turner...said, "That woman has been the immediate cause of the death of six of my servants."

Her descendants, however, feel that Caroline Turner has been much maligned. They claim that, far from abusing her slaves, she was in fact practicing simple household discipline and that there is no evidence, save anecdotal, of any violence on her part.

In 1843, Judge Fielding Turner died. His will gives credence to the reputation of his wife: "I have some slaves. I give them to my children, none of them are to go to the said Caroline, for it would be to doom them to misery in life and a speedy death."

The events of the following year ensured Caroline Turner her place in Lexington history. Through whatever means, Caroline was able to retain some slaves. Whether they were those formerly belonging to her husband or whether she obtained new ones is not known. An excerpt hidden away in the August 24, 1844 edition of the *Observer and Reporter Newspaper* of



The Eastern Lunatic Asylum was the second such institution in the nation and a forerunner of mental healthcare. *Courtesy of Lexington History Museum.*

Lexington reported the fate of Caroline: "Mrs. Turner was reproving...her carriage driver for some bad conduct the evening before, when he seized and strangled her, before she could be rescued from his murderous grasp."

Those who have written about the incident since have claimed that, being raised in Boston, Caroline had never been exposed to slavery and that when she came to Lexington and owned slaves, her latent brutality came to the surface. However, a family history argues that such claims of brutality have been heavily embellished. Further, her history of childhood trauma, parental rejection and the loss of her own children were all more than anyone could have borne.

The slave, Richard Moore, had been described thus at the time of his sale: "[A]bout 24 years of age...he is very sensible and plausible." Richard was captured in Scott County as he attempted to flee. Back in Lexington, he was tried and hanged for the murder of Caroline Turner. A newspaper report from Paris, Kentucky, claimed that he had previously been tried for

500 DOLLARS REWARD!



RUNAWAY on Thursday (23d inst.) from the residence of Mrs. C. A. TURNER, a negro man by the name of

RICHAHD.

He is about 24 years of age, of yellow complexion, about 6 feet high. He can read and write, and is a very sensible and plausible negro. He was raised in Fleming county, Ky., by James Jones, who this year brought him to Lexington, and sold him. Mrs. TURNER was found STRANGLED in her house, and from all the circumstances it is believed Richard murdered her, as she was his mistress, and he left immediately after the occurrence.

The above reward will be given for his apprehension out of the State, or \$300 if taken in the State, and, in either case, delivered at the Lexington Jail.

OSCAR TURNER,

Fayette county, Ky. aug 21. 33

Louisville Journal, Maysville Eagle, and Cincinnati Gazette copy to amount of \$2 each, and ch. this office.

This runaway slave notice offered a \$500 reward for the man who killed Caroline Turner. He was caught and hanged.

two attempted murders in Flemingsburg. Given the attitudes of the day, this is highly suspect. A slave would have been unlikely to receive a fair trial, even less to be acquitted of any such crime. He certainly would not have survived and then moved on to Lexington. Equally unlikely is that any newspaper or court would have held Mrs. Turner responsible for cruelty toward a slave.

Many years later, Kentucky author Robert Penn Warren included the story of Caroline Turner in his Pulitzer Prize-winning classic, *All the King's Men*. He offered the following explanation for her deeds:

One lady said to me, "Mrs. Turner did not understand Negroes." And another, "Mrs. Turner did it because she was from Boston where the Abolitionists are." But I did not understand. Then, much later, I began to understand. I understood that Mrs. Turner flogged her Negroes for the same reason that the wife of my friend sold Phoebe down the river: she could not bear their eyes upon her. I understand, for I can no longer bear their eyes upon me.

Was Caroline Sargent Turner a victim of circumstance? Did she inherit some genetic trait of violence from her mother? Had the misery of her own childhood, followed by the tragic deaths of her children, led to some sort of breakdown that manifested in an attack against her slaves? Or did she somehow become a misunderstood figment of Lexington's history? We may never know.

BELLE BREZING

So who was the most wicked woman of Lexington? How about a woman who, in her own day, was both celebrated and reviled, a woman whose death was reported in *Time* magazine and a woman in whose honor an annual race is held in the city? It was none other than Madam Belle.

Mary Belle Cox was born on June 16, 1860, the illegitimate child of seamstress/prostitute Sarah Ann Cox. The following year, when Sarah Ann married, Mary Belle and her elder sister, Hester, took the surname Brezing. Their mother would change their name again a few years later when she filed for divorce from George Brezing and moved in with William McMeekin.