



Saugatuck House Hotel, 1852. Cordelia Brown came to Saugatuck with her parents in 1881 and along with them was "actively identified with the management of the Saugatuck House". It was located where The Saugatuck Drug Store is today.

CORDELLA BROWN KELTNER

1850–1892

A Woman Ahead of Her Time

Cordelia Brown was born in Prairie Round, MI in 1850. She married Frank Keltner when she was eighteen, became a widow two years later in 1870 and never remarried. She came to Saugatuck with her parents in 1881 and along with them was "actively identified with the management of the Saugatuck House". She likely helped with the day-to-day operations of the boarding house.

In addition to her take-charge personality, Cordelia was also known for her philanthropy. She was praised for her reaction to an "unfortunate" event in the *Lakeshore Commercial*, May 3, 1889. A young, single woman from Indiana arrived in Saugatuck and began working at the Saugatuck House. Within a few months it became apparent that she was "in a delicate condition" (pregnant) and was dismissed from employment, as was customary in those days. She went to live with her sister's family in nearby Singapore. Shortly thereafter, the girl was found in convulsions. A doctor was called but he could not save her. "It is not positively known that the girl died by poison, self-administered, but the circumstances strongly confirm such a suspicion...She was visited often by Mrs. Keltner and her friend Mrs. Schanberg who did all in their power to make her last days comfortable...This is practical Christianity...."

Giving further insight into the lives of women at this time the article explains that the "author of her misfortune" (the baby's father) lived in Indiana and had betrayed the young woman under the promise of marriage. "A day or so before her death a letter came for her from a man in Indiana urging her to return to that place for the purpose of being married. When the letter reached her she was in the shadow of death. Her wrongs were destined never to be righted on earth."

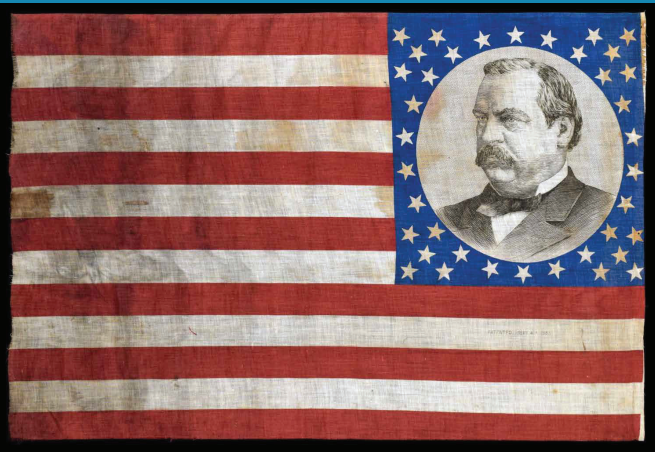
Despite her admirable independence and open minded generosity in an era that did not encourage either in women, Cordelia did not live long. She died in 1892 at the age of 42 of kidney disease: "As to the worth and virtues of this estimable woman the people of this community need no information. It is enough to say that her untimely death made sad the heart of every person who knew her. For her to see a case of poverty or distress was to attempt to relieve it no matter what the labor or cost or how humble the object."

Cordelia Brown Keltner researched by fellow
Team HerStoryans, Annie Hayes, Janice Krakowski,
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Annie Hayes Janice Krakowski
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"Not for Cleveland in this house."

In an article in the *Lakeshore Commercial* on November 14, 1884 (*Pulls Down the Flag*), Cordelia was described, "while not exactly landlady" as having "considerable say around the house and not being fooled by much." She was said to have reacted strongly to a "misereant" hanging a flag supporting President Glover Cleveland during his 1888 campaign on the roof of the Saugatuck House. Although women could not vote at this time that didn't stop her from taking action. She climbed up on the roof and chopped the offensive item down.



This is a reproduction of a political campaign flag used by President Grover Cleveland during the Presidential campaign of 1888, similar to the one mentioned in this story. The thirty-eight star flag represents the inclusion of Colorado to the Union. Colorado was admitted on August 1st, 1876 and this flag became official on July 4th, 1877. The thirty-eight star flag was official until July 4th, 1890, the time at which the forty-three star flag became official and began to represent the inclusion of North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Washington, and Idaho to the Union.