

Rockville's Independent Women

By Jean Luddy

As the 20th century progressed, opportunities for American women expanded as they successfully fought for the right to vote, gained increased access to higher education and expanded their career options in the working world. Whether by choice or by necessity, women have needed to become self-sufficient. The following stories of three women from Rockville illustrate how some 19th and 20th century women took charge of their future and, by getting a good education, were able to live productive and meaningful lives.

Alline E. Marcy (1868 -1912), born in Rockville, was the daughter of Dwight Marcy, a prominent local lawyer and Connecticut politician. In 1886, she graduated from Rockville High School with honors. At that time RHS Honors students wrote an essay on a current issue which was then printed in the *Rockville Journal*. Miss Marcy discussed the rights of citizens. Parts of the essay were printed in the *Rockville Journal* in June 1886.

In her essay referred to as “thoughtful and logical”, Miss Marcy discussed the rights of the capitalist, laborer, women and property. She believed that some rights were natural while others were God-given. Rights can be political or civic. A government has to protect the rights of its citizens. “Therefore if a man violates the rights of another, it is injuring the government, and by injuring the government, he is violating the rights of [all] others.” Later in the essay, “Miss Marcy argued that the country would suffer, should women be allowed to vote, because they could not take proper care of their households, and their home therefore would run down. There is however, one right to which women are entitled, and that is, where she does the same work and does it equally as well as the man working beside her, she should receive the same compensation. The most prominent question before the courts today is that of rights between the employer and the employed.”

Alline Marcy entered the law school at Boston University. This remarkable achievement was profiled in an article from the *New York Herald* of April 13, 1890 entitled “Connecticut Women as Lawyers: Miss Alline C. Marcy will be the second”. This article was printed in the *Rockville Journal* on April 17, 1890 (page 2, column 2)

“Connecticut will have another lady lawyer possible before another year has past- Miss Alline C. Marcy, of Rockville, daughter of the late Dwight Marcy, a distinguished member of the Tolland County Bar, and at one time Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives. Miss Marcy is twenty-two years old and has resided in Rockville from her childhood. She entered Rockville High School at fourteen and was graduated with honors from the class of 1886. Miss Marcy began studying law with her father and after his death in 1887, continued her studies in the office of B. H. Bill, State Attorney of Tolland County. In October of 1889, she entered the Law School of Boston University where she will complete her legal studies. She is a member of the Rockville Literary Society, the Young Women's Temperance Union and the Tennis Club and has been prominent in all leading society affairs. On her departure for Boston, she was tendered a farewell reception by the Tennis Club. Miss Marcy is slender, of dark complexion, and is a prepossessing young lady of every respect. After graduation, she will probably practice in Rockville.”

Alline Marcy did not return to Rockville to pursue her careers as a lawyer. She established a successful practice in the Boston area. Sadly she died at the age of 44 years in May of 1912 and was laid to rest with her family in the family plot at Grove Hill Cemetery. The *Rockville Journal* informed the community about Miss Marcy's death.



“The news of the sudden death of Miss Alline E. Marcy which occurred Wednesday of last week at a New York hospital following an operation

was a shock to her relatives and friends in this city. She was the daughter of the late Dwight Marcy of this city, a leading lawyer of his day and at one time speaker of the House of Representatives.

Miss Marcy was a woman of rare talents and accomplishments, of beautiful character and marked intellectual attainments. She graduated from the Rockville High School with high honors and then took up the study of law at the Boston University Law School from which she was graduated.

The Boston dispatch announcing her death stated: "Miss Alline E. Marcy, a pioneer woman lawyer in this state, is dead at a New York hospital, where she went recently for an operation. For many years she was the title examiner for the Metropolitan Water Board. When the board undertook the Clinton reservoir work, the handling of titles involved was done by her. She was a graduate of Boston University Law School and for two years after that was with a title insurance company. About two years ago, she started a practice of her own. She was vice-president of the Massachusetts Association of Women Lawyers and a member of the Pentagon and Business Women's Clubs."

Marietta Fitch (1875-1976), also born into a prominent Rockville family, was the granddaughter of Samuel Fitch, Rockville's first mayor and the daughter of businessman Spencer Fitch. Her interest in music became apparent when she was 6 years old. She studied music locally with Mrs. N. F. Peck of Hartford, the sister of local political leader E. S. Henry. Later she spent a year at the Juilliard School of Music in New York City.



Upon finishing her training, she embarked on a career as a music teacher which lasted for over 45 years. In her time as a teacher of piano and organ, she calculated that she had taught over 300 students. She taught music in local schools for over 27 years and offered private lessons to musicians of all ages. A founding member of the Connecticut Music Teacher Association, she held leadership positions for several years. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she played the organ at several area churches for many years.

A firm believer in women's rights, she was one of the first female members of the Vernon Board of Education. In an article from a local paper in 1970, she explained how the Board of Education reluctantly got its first female member.

"She was a member of a group of suffragettes and, as she recalled, they decided one of their number should be on the all-male school board. Her family owned the Fitch Mill and were staunch Republicans. So they attended the Republican caucus with their intent. 'But', she related, 'they put us out so we all signed up for the Democratic party.' Miss Fitch was put on the ticket and won. (She's still voting as a Democrat.) She explained, 'All my Republican friends split their ticket and voted for me, but I didn't want it.' She took the job however, and in spite of a frosty reception by the men on the board, went to work. Through her efforts, the first parent-teacher association was organized."

After her retirement from teaching, she traveled, continued to give private lessons and served as a member of the Rockville General Hospital Auxiliary. A well-loved and respected citizen of Rockville, she was interviewed on her 90th and 95th birthdays. "She credited her long-time good health to her motto, 'I never hurried and I never worried.'" She believed in fresh air and daily exercise. "The trouble with so many old people is they get stiff." She practiced her piano daily throughout her long life. In her 90s, she played at local nursing homes and for gatherings of friends. Marietta Fitch passed away a few months short of her 101st birthday.

Hazel Lutz (1902-1985) came from a Rockville family with a mercantile background. Her father George Lutz owned the Lutz Hardware Store located in the center of Rockville. She, her sister Cora, and brother Frank grew up in the family home on Reed Street where she lived for her whole life.

Educated as an art teacher, Hazel Lutz spent her professional career working for the Manchester, Connecticut school system starting as a teacher, later becoming the art supervisor. There were no established art rooms in the elementary schools in the 1930s. She would visit each school once a month and also meet with the teachers to plan art lessons for students in all grades.

In addition to teaching students how to paint and draw, she would bring along to the class a collection of wonderful and unusual objects. She believed that it was important to children to handle and examine art and objects up close to truly appreciate them. "Lutz toted a mini-museum from the trunk of her car to classrooms around town. She carried artifacts of minerals, textiles, embroideries, costumes and slides of artwork. Most of the items were donated by friends who purchased them while visiting foreign lands." (Hartford Courant 9/3/1998) By the early 1950s, the collection, which was stored in a school basement, had grown large enough that Miss Lutz decided that a permanent home was needed. With donations from civic and social groups including the Manchester PTA Council, the Lutz Children's Museum opened in its present location, 247 South Main Street, Manchester, in 1953. To establish a Museum building fund in the 1970s, Miss Lutz contributed 10,000 from her life savings. When she and her siblings passed away in the mid 1980s, they left about \$77,000 to support the Children's Museum. Miss Lutz's dream for a museum for children lives on with Lutz Children's Museum which recently celebrated its 60th anniversary.



Hazel Lutz, a community minded citizen, helped to found the Manchester and Vernon Historical Society and initiated beautification projects in both towns. In addition to being a founding member of the Vernon Historical Society, she was active on the Board for a number of years. She authored two publications about the local history of Vernon and Rockville. *Vernon Vignettes, vol.1 and vol.2* contain a series of short essays about significant events and memorable people from our town. Each essay is accompanied by charming illustrations drawn by Miss Lutz. She gave the Vernon Historical Society several family items, including the sign from the Lutz Hardware Store and a petite blue wool suit of hers made from Hockanum Mill fabric.

In an article entitled "Hazel Lutz and her Dream", Manchester Historian Susan Barlow summarized Miss Lutz's achievements and gave examples of her impact on her students and her communities. http://www.manchesterhistory.org/reprints/MH55_HazelLutz.html

'Rockville was her hometown, and she lived at 2 Reed Street her whole life, 1902-1985. The large Victorian house was surrounded by Miss Lutz's extensive gardens. She had one sister, Dr. Cora E. Lutz, and one brother, Frank G. Lutz, who ran the family's hardware store in Rockville. Hazel Lutz never married.

In describing her, Charles Jacobson said, "Miss Lutz was a magnificent spinster. The students worshipped her. Bob Eckert, Executive Director of the museum, displays Miss Lutz's words in framed posters at the museum. He finds these words fresh and inspiring, although Miss Lutz penned them decades ago:

"We must at all times keep a well-balanced museum appealing to all facets of a child's curiosity. Nature, Science, Industry, Art, Ethnology, and History must be kept in delicate balance so that no one field of man's experience dominates all the others. In a museum, as in all living things, there is no standing still. We must move forward or we drift backward. No institution is so perfect that it cannot be improved – so it is with ours – a place where leisure learning is a happy experience – a task never ending."

The three women profiled here created independent lives for themselves. Coming from families of moderate or substantial means, they had the opportunity to get an education which allowed them to support themselves with a professional career. It would be interesting to learn what they would think now about the choices and challenges facing young women today in the 21st century.