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19th Century Progressive: Emma Molloy

Patrick McGuire, Curator of Education, presented the third in a year-long series of People of Elkhart: Emma Milloy, Born in South Bend, in 1839, then Emma Barrett had articles published in local newspapers as a teenager. At 18, she married Louis Pradt, a journeyman printer. Not a happy marriage, their 2 children did not survive childhood. In 1867, she divorced him for habitual drunkenness. Back in South Bend, she married Edward Molloy, editor of a failing newspaper: The National Union, and became the first female editor in IN. After selling the National Union, they headed to Elkhart, IN in 1872 to start the Elkhart Observer. Both through her articles and speeches as she advocated for rights for women to divorce, for temperance, the right of women to vote (suffrage), and even abortion, she gained a national and international reputation. But in 1876, they sold the Observer, and she embraced the Blue Ribbon movement, a forerunner of Alcoholics Anonymous and traveled widely. Then in 1882, she divorced Edward over family issues, and took their son Frank, daughter Etta and foster daughter, Cora Lee to Illinois. But the friendship developed through her temperance lectures with convicted criminal George A. Graham would eventually lead to a grave threat to her reputation and even being accused of involvement in the murder of Graham's wife, Sarah, whose body was found in a well on Molloy's property.

Just the Facts:

In Washington, KS advocating for temperance in prisons and among the Cherokee Indians, was when it all went wrong. Edward was convicted of murder of his wife and in 1886, was lynched by towns folk. For 2 years, Emma and her foster daughter Cora Lee who had married the bigamous Graham were kept charged for involvement in the murder. During this time, her son Franklin drowned. Finally cleared in 1888, she spent the rest of her life advocating for religion (The WTCU - Women's Temperance Union) and rebuilt her reputation. She married cousin Morris Barrett in 1889. He died in 1903. She died in 1907, aged 67 years. Local Historian Martha M. Pickrell wrote a book, "Emma Speaks Out Life and Writings of Emma Molloy 1839-1907"