



PHOTO PROVIDED

Postcard of Nice Monument. Shown is a postcard featuring the Nice Monument in the Vallamont section of Williamsport.

## Williamsport Women

by MARY SIEMINSKI

### Elizabeth Lyman Nice: Advocate for animal welfare

By JANET McNEIL HURLBERT  
Special to the Sun-Gazette

Elizabeth Keziah Lyman Nice (1832-1895) donated much of her time to humanitarian concerns in Williamsport. Her obituary, in the Williamsport Gazette & Bulletin in Jan. 21, 1895, states that she was "known by reason of the zealous and unflagging devotion to humane enterprises, having practically given up her life to philanthropic work."



NICE

As is the case for many women of her generation who shared much of their time with others, there are few records to document her efforts. We do know that Nice signed the temperance pledge and was a member of First Baptist Church. Nice, however, will live in Lycoming County's history as the leading spirit behind the founding of the local Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. As her obituary reported, "She was untiring in showing up and bringing to justice those who maltreated dumb brutes."

Elizabeth Lyman came from a notable Massachusetts family. She was a direct descendent of

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## Elizabeth Lyman Nice: Advocate for animal welfare

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Richard Lyman, who emigrated from England in 1631. Family members of the previous generation had distinguished themselves serving in the Revolutionary War, and her brothers volunteered in the Civil War.

After moving to Tioga County, New York, where she was born, her immediate family eventually settled in Great Bend. By the time she was 13, she had lost her mother and also her physician father, who died after an accident with a "vicious" horse.

Elizabeth Lyman married John F. Nice, of Jersey Shore, who was listed in the census first as a coach maker like his father and then as a daguerreotype artist. He had a photography business in Jersey Shore and then in Lewisburg, eventually settling into business permanently at 3 E. Third St. in Williamsport. The couple lived for many years at 329 Maynard St. and remained childless.

### Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

The 19th century was a turning point in how society viewed animals. The first Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was organized in England in 1824. Stopping abuse of horses in the carriage business was a priority, but gradually the movement expanded to include dogs and other animals. The first American SPCA was started in 1866 in New York City. In 1877, there

was an article in the Gazette & Bulletin soliciting support from Lycoming County for a fair to be held in Philadelphia by the women's branch of the Pennsylvania state SPCA.

It was not until 1892 that the SPCA began operations in this county, with Nice as the first board president. Other members of the 12-person board included her husband and Mr. and Mrs. James P. Herdic. The purpose of the organization as set forth in its charter was to prevent cruelty to animals throughout the county and enforce laws for the protection of "dumb" animals, securing the arrest and punishment of all who violated such laws. The group also would erect and maintain fountains, tanks, troughs and other receptacles of fresh water for the "dumb creation."

A May 18, 1892, Gazette & Bulletin article encouraged membership in the organization by pointing out the extent of brutality toward animals: "Proportionately there are more horses unfit for use at work and hard work too on our streets than in cities many times larger than ours. Poor, old, blind, lame horses are put to hard labor in order to earn food for strong, healthy, thoughtless, brutal men."

The reader was reminded that the protection of animals should not just be the work of a few women, but was everyone's responsibility.

### Children's Band of Mercy

Nice also started the local Children's Band of Mercy. This effort had begun in England as part of the temperance movement, but soon became associated with the prevention of cruelty to animals.

In 1882, the organization first appeared in Massachusetts, and it quickly spread across the country. Nice instructed children on how to treat and care for animals. At a typical meeting, the children would recite stories and sing songs as well as memorize the pledge: "I will try to be kind to all living creatures, and try to protect them from cruel usage."

Advocates believed that children who were cruel to animals would soon be cruel to their parents, brothers and sisters. As the Gazette & Bulletin article of May 18, 1892, explained, "Belonging to that band will aid them very materially in becoming humane, useful, Christian citizens."

### Memorial to Elizabeth Nice

After Nice's untimely death at the age of 62, a committee including Mrs. Herdic met in the mayor's office to come up with a plan to raise \$1,000 to fund an 11-foot memorial in her memory. An April 6, 1895, Gazette & Bulletin article described the monument: "The fountain is a substantial iron concern with drinking places for man and beast."

The memorial was placed in the Vallamont area of the city, a few feet south of Prospect Terrace at the foot of the Glen

Echo road. Long-time residents of Williamsport say that the monument, or at least the top of the monument, eventually was moved to the Golden Strip and later sold at auction.

### Untimely death

Nice's generous spirit extended to human beings as well as animals. Her obituary in the Gazette & Bulletin was titled "Stricken down in the midst of philanthropic and humane labors." It stated the belief that, in fact, she gave up her life for these labors by nursing a poor woman in her sick bed at an "untimely hour" and contracting typhoid pneumonia from her. The obituary went on to say, "The death of Mrs. Nice removes a well-known and lovable figure from our community." Nice is buried in Wildwood Cemetery.

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