

Williamsport Women: Ellen Sprout and Margaret Waldron

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by MARY SIEMINSKI

Sprout, Waldron & Co. once was one of Muncy's most important industrial enterprises and its leading employer. The company produced machines for grinding, crushing, mixing and sifting a wide variety of materials. It also made conveyors and bucket elevators. These machines were shipped to every state in the nation and internationally.

From its beginnings in Picture Rocks as Sprout and Burrows, the company evolved

into Sprout, Waldron & Co. in 1895 under the leadership of Lewis B. Sprout's son-in-law John Waldron. Many members of the Sprout and Waldron families were involved over time, and it remained a family-owned business for generations. It is now the Feed and Biofuel Division of Andritz, a global company.

As the company evolved, Mrs. Sprout and Mrs. Waldron became the leading ladies of Muncy. I wondered about these

women: Who were Ellen Donnelly Sprout and her daughter Maggie Sprout Waldron? As is typical for women of that era, most of what we know about their lives comes from stories about their husbands, newspaper articles and the work of diligent local historians, like Linda Poulton and the Muncy Historical Society, where I found much of the information on the two women.

Ellen Donnelly Sprout

Ellen Susan Donnelly Sprout lived a long life. In her 83 years, she was a witness to both the Civil War and World War I and both horses and buggies and automobiles. Born in 1834 in Montrose, Susquehanna County, she was the daughter of an Irish immigrant farmer, Michael Donnelly, and his wife, Mary. In 1855, she married Lewis



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Shown are undated photographs of Ellen Donnelly Sprout, left, and her daughter, Maggie Sprout Waldron, from the collection of the Muncy Historical Society.

Bosworth Sprout, who also had lived in Susquehanna County. She moved with him to Picture Rocks, where he had settled with other members of his family the year before.

Lewis's brother Asa Sprout

and their Uncle Amos Burrows had bought the land in 1849, when there was one house, a barn and an unused sawmill.

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But other family members soon followed, and a small village grew up.

The sawmill became the first manufacturing plant, producing sashes, doors and blinds. Anyone who wanted to buy land in Picture Rocks had to sign an agreement not to open a tavern or sell liquor. There was no currency for many years — bartering predominated. Most residents were Baptists. A Baptist Society was formed, but there was no church, and there was no post office until 1861. It is hard for me to imagine what life was like for Ellen.

The babies began arriving soon after the marriage. Margaret Amelia, known as Maggie, was born in 1855, followed by Augusta, Charles, Annie and Lucilla. The youngest child, Fred, was born in 1874. By that time, the family had moved into an elegant Greek Revival home in Muncy.

Lewis, described by John Jordan in his 1906 history of Lycoming County as "a study Scotsman," served in the Civil War. Ellen was active in Muncy "society." Local news featured stories of her driving with friends to such places as Highland Lake and Eagles Mere and hosting sleighing parties for her

Sunday school classes with her daughters. In August 1911, when she was 77, she entertained 60 ladies for luncheon at her Muncy home.

The Sprout family were very active in the Baptist church — first in Picture Rocks, then in Hughesville and finally in Muncy, where a Baptist church had been established in 1841.

The year before her death in 1918, Ellen donated \$2,000 worth of Sprout, Waldron & Co. stock to the pipe organ fund. The next year, a Moeller Pipe Organ was installed in her memory, according to "Now and Then," volume 26, August 2004. "Now and Then" is a periodical published by the Muncy Historical Society. She was buried in the family burial plot in Muncy Cemetery, where her husband had been buried 20 years earlier.

Maggie Amelia Sprout Waldron

Margaret Amelia Sprout was born in Picture Rocks on Oct. 1, 1855. I have found no mention of her until her marriage to John Waldron of Montgomery Station on Dec. 9, 1875, at her parents' home in Muncy. She had been listed in census records as "at school," so she most likely attended school in Muncy. John Waldron, described

by John Jordan as having an "impressive personality" and "splendid physique," was a veteran of the Civil War, where he lost his left arm. After the war, he worked as a telegraph operator and then the stationmaster in Montgomery. According to Linda Poulton, within five years of Waldron's marriage to Maggie, "L. B. Sprout transferred his hay fork business to his son-in-law," according to Poulton in "Now and Then," volume 25, April 2000.

Maggie Waldron gave birth to 10 children over the next 14 years. The first was Charles, born in 1876. The next five children, born over the following seven years, all died before reaching their third year; three of them died in the same year (1883). Those who lived into adulthood were, in addition to Charles, sons Harris, Howard and Frederick and daughter Amelia.

John Waldron was active in the business until his death in 1902 at the age 59. Then Maggie took over his interest in Sprout, Waldron and was very successful. She also continued her work at the Baptist church in which her family had been so active, serving as president of the missionary society. According to a story published upon her death, she was known

from "one end of the town to the other" for her good works and charity.

Maggie died 10 years after her husband, in an accident with her prized team of horses. According to the Sun-Gazette (Sept. 12, 1912), she had been on an excursion with her daughter, two daughters-in-law and a grandson when a passing automobile frightened the horses and they started on a run. "Thrown off balance Maggie Waldron fell from the carriage backwards, breaking her neck in the fatal fall. Her daughter Amelia was badly scratched and bruised" and other family members were badly injured, according to Poulton in "Now and Then," volume 25, April 2000.

Maggie's younger sister Lucilla also was well known in Muncy. Lucilla married Stephen Soars in 1889, and he became secretary of the firm. Sons, sons-in-law and nephews were business partners in the internationally known firm, which was so important in Lycoming County history.

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