

Calvert Malcolm Coleman (1842 - 1919)

Calvert Malcolm Coleman was a man whose life encompassed many mysteries and factual inconsistencies. Even his date of birth is open to question.

The first public document I could find mentioning Calvert is the record of his marriage to Sarah Elizabeth Westfall on December 24, 1863 in Van Buren, Michigan. It states that he was 23 and that she was 21. If this is correct, then Calvert would have been born in 1840. But two census records indicate he was born in 1842.

He and Sarah had eight children – four boys and four girls. The oldest, William Henry Coleman, was born in 1864. The youngest, Arthur Roy Coleman, was born 20 years later.

The 1870 census shows Calvert as a farmer living with Sarah and three children in Van Buren Township.

The 1880 census also lists him as a farmer. However, he then lived in a community in Wayne County known as Springwells. Calvert's neighbors were mostly Irish and German immigrants.

Living with Calvert in 1880 was his wife Sarah and six children. But conspicuously absent was his oldest child, William. This is strange because at the age of 16, William would have been a prime age for a farm hand. Perhaps William left due to problems at home, or maybe farm life was just not to his liking.

The Detroit City Directory lists Calvert Coleman as a resident in 1882. His occupation was reported to be a laborer. His youngest child, Arthur Roy Coleman, was born in 1884. Roy's belated birth certificate states that he was born in

Belleville. But the birth certificate was issued in 1941 and it was based on the affidavit of a brother of Roy. So its accuracy is somewhat questionable.

The 1888 Detroit City Directory shows Calvert Coleman as a resident who was living with his son Samuel.

Census records after 1880 do not list Calvert again until 1900. In that year he was living with his son Claud and Claud's family. Although Calvert was separated from Sarah, he was still legally married to her. His next door neighbor was listed as James Pullen.

The 1910 census shows Calvert as divorced and living with a widow who owned a "home farm." It says that Calvert worked for her as a farm hand.

The next documentary reference to Calvin appears in an obituary notice published in the Daily Ypsilantian Press on March 8, 1919. This notice, provided by family researcher Clarice Coleman, states:

"Calvin Coleman, aged 83 years, died at the infirmary at Eloise, Monday, March 3, 1919. The remains were brought to the undertaking rooms of J.C. Pullen and Son at this place (Belleville) Monday, and funeral services held there Wednesday afternoon. The deceased was well known here having lived in this vicinity for over 50 years. He is survived by four sons and two daughters."

Eloise was a state institution for people who were alcoholics, drug addicts, or mentally ill. Rather than having him buried on its premises in an area for those who were financially destitute, his former neighbor, James Pullen, had Calvert buried in an unmarked grave in Hillside Cemetery in Belleville. Pullen owned a local mortuary.