

You've Come a Long Way, Mrs. Ingram
by Bryan Thompson



Lucy Ann Ingram Farm Lot 34 Near Kendrew Corners
From Beer's Atlas of St Lawrence County 1865

2017 marks the hundredth anniversary of women in New York State gaining the right to vote. In searching through our historian's records I came across this note in the 1896 obituary of Lucy Ann Ingram. "With determined mind and good health she went to work, planned her business and carried it all out, paying for the farm,

which is today a good one, erected barns, educated her children and provided for their comfort.” Her story clearly illustrates how the lot of women has changed in the last 200 years.

Lucy Ann Ingram was born in Prescott, Upper Canada in 1822. She was the oldest child of Edward Wall and Mariah Woods Wall. When Lucy was two years old the family traveled by boat across the St Lawrence and up the Oswegatchie River to the location of the Wall homestead near Kendrew. At the time there were no roads in the vicinity so all access was by boat. They built a crude log cabin chinked with moss and shingled with bark.

As Lucy grew up the family prospered. They built a commodious house and raised a large family. In 1840 at the age of 18 Lucy Ann married Silas Darius Ingram.

In 1840, women in New York State were still subject to the Common Law principal of feme covert. Under the law, upon marriage, Lucy became one person with her husband. She no longer existed in the view of the law. Any money she earned or any property she owned belonged to Silas. Even the children she would bear were her husband’s exclusive property. He was entitled to all wages the children might earn up to the age of 21. Lucy could not even write her own will or enter into any contract as long as Silas was living.

Things went along well for the young couple for a few years. Silas entered into a land contract with John I. De Graff on May 25, 1847 for 106 acres of Lot number 34 on the Child’s Rd just two miles from Lucy’s parents farm. The land was then uncleared forest.

The young couple had eight children: Eliza, Mary, James, unknown, Louisa, Silas Miles, Lucy Ann and Adaline J.. Three children, Eliza, Adaline J. and unknown died in infancy.

In 1848 John Fine of Ogdensburg, introduced Chapter 200 of the laws of NYS for 1848, “The Married Women’s Property Act”. New York State became the first state in the United States to allow women to keep control of property they

brought into a marriage or inherited while they were married. They still could not enter into contracts or keep their own wages but they could control their own property.

According to the 1850 US Agricultural census Silas and Lucy Ann had cleared and improved 40 acres of land. They had 4 horses, 5 milch cows, 8 sheep and 2 swine on the farm. In the last year they had raised 12 bushels of wheat, 20 bushels of indian corn, 60 bushels of irish potatoes, made 200 pounds of butter, 60 pounds of maple sugar and 25 pounds of wool.

In 1853 Silas Ingram decided to try his luck in California and left the family. Lucy Ann Ingram stayed on the farm on the Child's Rd. but she was in legal limbo. If her husband was still alive she could not enter into his land contract, all payments she made were his. If she paid off the land it would belong to Silas not her. He even owned the labor of their five children.

Because no payments were being made a separate land contract was made by De Graff with Francis Sampier for twenty five acres off the southern end of Lucy's farm on Stevenson Rd. Lucy Ann Ingram struggled along improving what was left, building a snug farm house, and several barns.

However all that she produced was in jeopardy because her husband was still alive. He had first moved to Ohio where he remarried (with no record of divorce) and started a new family. In 1860 he was living with his new family in Syracuse, Missouri. Finally in 1870 he arrives in Sonoma County CA where he would live for the next 31 years.

March 20, 1860 New York State passed Chapter 90, "An Act concerning the rights and liabilities of husband and wife." For the first time a married woman could hold her own property, collect her own wages, enter into contracts and lawsuits and have joint custody of her children. The one caveat was that a married woman could not sell her property without the written permission of her husband.

Less than two months later, May 17, 1860, Lucy Ann arranged for her brother, James Wall to purchase the land formerly contracted to Silas Ingram from De Graff, thus removing Silas's name from the property. In June 1865, James Wall deeded the farm to Lucy Ann Ingram. Lucy was actually running the farm the whole time. In 1860, 1861, 1862 and 1865 the voters of Kendrew School District 8 exempted her from paying her share of schoolteacher's wages. It was a common practice at the time for widows, the ill and elderly to have the tax forgiven.

Lucy paid \$1000 for the property and assumed a mortgage of \$645. Lucy Ann's oldest son James Ingram enlisted in the Union Army, December 23, 1863. He died of disease at Richmond, Virginia March 15, 1864 at the age of 19. Lucy Ann's other son Miles Silas contracted consumption and died in 1867 at the age of 18. Lucy and her three daughters continued to run the farm and paid off the debt. Lucy Ann Ingram was the only woman in the town at the time of the 1870 US Census to list her occupation as farmer!

The 1880 US Agricultural Census throws some light on how Lucy adapted to running the farm as a single woman. She had 25 acres under tillage and 39 acres of permanent pasture. She owned no draft animals of any kind. All of the other households in her neighborhood except two had draft animals. They were usually an essential form of transportation. Lucy paid more in wages (\$100) than all of her neighbors except one. Most of her neighbors paid nothing in wages for outside help. At the time of the 1880 census She had Thomas Day, a sixteen year old farm hand, living with her.

Lucy harvested 24 tons of hay, kept 27 head of dairy cattle and made 1200 pounds of butter (six times what was made when Silas was running the farm). She kept 44 chickens and sold 100 dozen eggs (more than double that of anyone else in the neighborhood). She grew 3 acres of barley (which yielded 41 bushels of grain), one acre of indian corn (which yielded 30 bushels of corn), 5 acres of oats (which yielded 102 bushels), one acre of Irish potatoes (which yielded 70 bushels). She had planted one acre of orchard, 40 trees, sometime in the past. In

1880 her bearing orchard yielded 100 bushels of apples, which she sold for \$13. She even harvested \$15 worth of firewood.

Lucy Ann Ingram ran a productive farm. She utilized outside labor for the heavy work, she couldn't do herself, but concentrated on the production of products such as butter, eggs and apples she could manage herself. In 1880 her farm was valued at \$1200 and she sold \$600 worth of on farm produce. That would be equivalent to \$13,300 in 2017.

Her obituary notes, Lucy was well and widely known in her neighborhood as a woman of strong mind and her counsel was relied upon by people through out the community.

Lucy Ann continued to manage her farm right up until 3 months before her death in June 1896 at the age of 74. Her estate lists an extensive collection of hand tools including everything from a buck saw and ax to numerous, hoes, shovels, rakes and a steelyard, but not a single horse drawn implement. She still owned 7 cows and 15 hens at the time of her death. Her house was well equipped, as it was furnished with parlor furniture, stoves, numerous sets of dishes, goblets and cooking utensils bedding etc.. Lucy obviously had created a comfortable home for herself.

Thanks to the act of 1860 Lucy was able to write her own will. In planning her estate Lucy left life use of her farm to her eldest surviving daughter Mary Newcomb. Upon Mary's death the farm was to be sold and the money divided among her two surviving daughters and her grandchildren.

Mary Newcomb signed over her role as executor of her mother's estate to her husband Samuel Newcomb. Samuel and Mary had been tenant farmers in De Peyster. They now moved onto Lucy's farm. Samuel paid Lucy Ingram's burial expenses from the estate and bought two tombstones: one for Lucy's two young daughters and one for Lucy. Lucy Ingram was buried beside her children in the Kendrew cemetery. The children's stone cost \$15 and still stands today. Lucy Ingram's stone cost \$60. It has disappeared in the 100 years since her death.



Tombstone of Lucy Ingram's Two Daughters in the Kendrew Cemetery.

Mary Newcomb died in 1901. Upon Mary Newcomb's death Samuel immediately began submitting bills to Lucy's estate for Lucy's care up until her death, and other previously unbilled expenses. The surrogate court disallowed all these expenses and began charging Samuel rent for the use of Lucy's farm from the time of Mary Newcomb death. Samuel was pressured to sell the farm and divide the money among Lucy's heirs.

Samuel Newcomb discovered an unpaid 1886 store account of Lucy Ingram's to Edward Todd's store in De Peyster. Samuel purchased the debt that with interest and fees he brought to \$300 against the estate. The farm was sold at auction to Robert Laraby on September 23, 1901. After paying the debt and fees for his services there was \$153.61 for each of Lucy Ingram's heirs.



Newspaper Ad for the sale of Lucy Ingram's Farm 1901.

Although Lucy Ingram didn't live long enough to vote, she did witness and benefit from the improved legal status of women in New York State. In her lifetime she went from being a legal nonentity to that of a successful independent farmer and business woman. She definitely came a long way in one lifetime!

Sources:

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