

The Mysterious Case of George Wiard

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On April 1, 1869, Francis (Frank) Wiard married Eunice Burnham, and shortly thereafter moved from Otsego, Michigan to Montague, Michigan. This union produced 10 children, 7 boys and 3 girls, the eldest of which was named George.

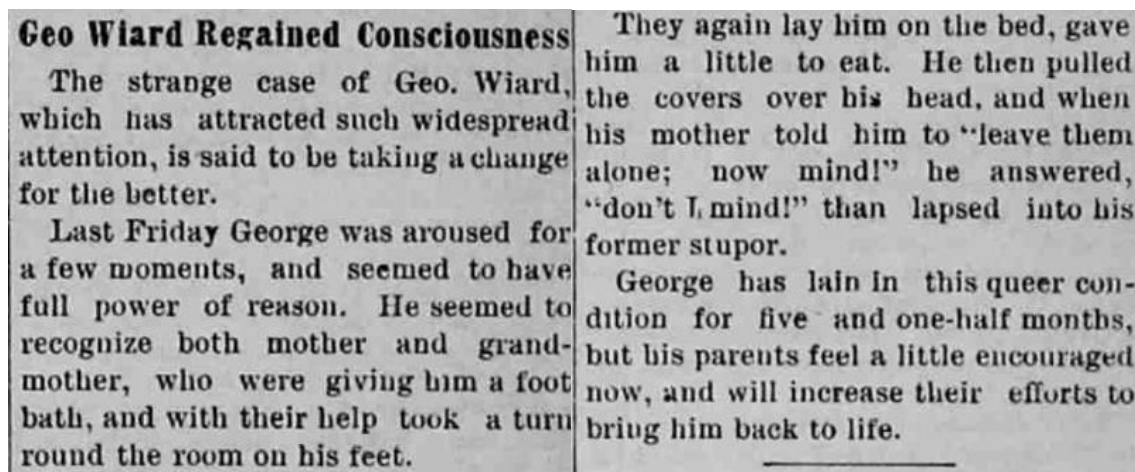
George grew to manhood and in 1891 was the picture of robust health. The 178-pound strapping lad was working in Muskegon, Michigan when he contracted a sickness known at the time as “La Grippe” but more commonly known now as influenza. Peculiarly, he came down with the sickness 22 years to the day of his parents wedding day, and it hit him hard, making it impossible to work, so he returned to his parent’s home in Montague to convalesce.

Recovery was a fleeting desire and he continued to grow worse, able to move around the house and assist his mother with some minor tasks but unable to go back to work. On May 1, 1891, while assisting his mother he toppled over in a fit. He was moved to a bed and a doctor was called, who promptly diagnosed him with a case of nervous prostration. It was unknown to all that George would spend the next 3 months sleeping in a trance like state 24 hours a day, unable to be aroused from his stupor.

Dr. A. B. Clement of Muskegon, Michigan was called to attend the case and the September 3, 1891, issue of the Montague Observer printed his statement:

“I was called to Montague to see a young man named George Wiard, aged 21, who has been confined to his bed for three months past. During seven weeks of this time he has lain unconscious, apparently in a trance. He seems to have lost control of every one of his senses excepting that of touch. When he is touched on the arm with a slight downward pressure he will raise his arm; when an attempt is made to move his head to the right he will turn it to the left; in trying to open his eyes he closed them so firmly that it was impossible to open them with the usual means at hand. Numerous physicians and specialists from different parts of the country have visited the young man and without exception they pronounce the case the most extraordinary on record. Mr. Wiard visited Muskegon in the early spring, taking orders for rubber stamps and may be remembered by some of the citizens of that place. I do not consider it strictly a case of trance, for in a trance if the person is shaken up they will sometimes open their eyes, but this man does not. It is a clear case of carus which is shown by the limbs acting in opposition to the force applied, this alone distinguishing it from coma, trance, and catalepsy. I never expect to meet such another case, it is one in fifty thousand.”

On October 23, 1891, George showed signs of recovery and the October 29, 1891, issue of the Montague Observer provided the details as follows:



To facilitate feeding, four of George's front teeth were removed. This action, seemingly extreme, was required to be able to feed him through his nearly closed mouth. George was fed a diet that consisted of beet tea, crackers soaked in milk, and gruel. Such a diet was barely able to keep him alive but was all they could accomplish due to his condition.

Over the 6 months since he became bedridden George's weight had dropped to 48 pounds, 130 pounds less than his weight when he became ill, rendering him as little more than a skin covered skeleton. His illness had become well known and many newspapers printed his story. This notoriety led to several offers to the family for George to appear as a "dime museum freak" which were all denied with indignation.

On the evening of November 8, 1891, George passed away, ending one of the most befuddling cases of illness ever observed in the greater White Lake area. George was buried in the Oak Grove cemetery located in Montague, Michigan.

Resources

Findagrave.com

The Montague Observer September 3, 1891

The Montague Observer October 29, 1891

The Montague Observer November 12, 1891

The Whitehall Forum September 3, 1891

The Whitehall Forum November 12, 1891