

DROWNED IN LANSING
STORY OF A DRWONING ACCIDENT IN THE YEAR 1844
Lansing Journal 11/24/1904

The Peninsular Star a weekly newspaper, published by James H. Wells at Mason, in his issue of April 6, 1844, contains the following account of a fatal accident.

“It becomes our painful duty to announce the sudden and unexpected death of our much esteemed citizen and friend, Colonel John W. Burchard. On the morning of the [4th] instant, while crossing Grand river, immediately below the mill dam, the boat he was in capsized and he was borne some distance from the spot by the fury of the element, when all sight of him was lost. Diligent search has been made to recover the body, but as yet without effect.

“Among the first who settled in this place (Mason), he was entrusted with many offices by the people, all of which he discharges with credit to himself and the satisfaction of his constituents. Of a quick and perceptive mind he was foremost in projecting plans, and devising measures to improve the facilities and extend the improvements and interests of his village and country and although in the midst of life and usefulness, he lived to see the inhospitable wilderness dotted with fruitful and cultivated fields, and the very spot shaded with the thick foliage of a dense forest – the lair of the wolf and the deer – converted into a populous village – the mart of business and wealth, and a country placed in a position truly enviable.

Col. B. was a member of the bar, and as such, highly esteemed. As a politician, he was liberal and consistent, ever willing to award the meed of honor and merit to whom it was due, of whatever political party or creed.”

“By the above decease a wife is bereft of a fond and affectionate friend and bosom companion, and two interesting little children deprived of a kind father’s watchfulness and protection – all, too in one sad and unexpected moment.”

Colonel Burchard built the first brick house, and his was the first family settles within the limits of the city of Lansing. He was born at Scipio, Cayuga county, state of New York in the year 1814. He studied law and was admitted to the bar at Rochester N.Y. in 1835, came west and began the practice of his profession at Mason two years later. His name as attorney first appears on the Circuit Court calendar, November 6, 1839, and frequently thereafter until August 11. 1842.

“Austin Blair, David Johnson. Samuel Higby, Edwin Lawrence and Daniel L. case were his legal contemporizes and associates in active practice and subsequently greatly distinguished in political and judicial life.

“April 7, 1841, at Mason, he was married to Miss Francis Haynes, October 13 of that year, the records show he purchased of James Seymour, the southeast fractional quarter, one hundred and nine acres, of section nine in the township of Lansing, including water power. This parcel is now the first ward of the city. In the early part of 1843 he built and with his family occupied a comfortable log house, which until fifteen years ago, stood a little west of Seymour, later Franklin House on Center street.”

“During the fall and winter of 1843-4, he completed a dam across the Grand river, the foundations of which support the present structure at North Lansing.

“During the April freshet, a break was discovered in the dam. Accompanied by William Pierce, Alonzo Baker and Coe G. Jones, he went out in a boat to determine the extent of it and check further damage if possible, with the result stated above. His companions made the shore. His body was found several miles downstream and rests in the old church yard at Mason.

“The property passed to others who erected a saw mill, which was in operation when the Capitol was located here in March, 1847.

“His widow survived him until 1888. His son John died childless. The daughter, Francis Louise married and left a daughter who is now Mrs. James Harris of 108 Seymour street and who with her son a lad of eighteen, are the only lineal descendants of the first home builder on the site of Michigan Capital City.” S.L. Kilbourne.