

HOW TO CATCH A SPY

Kate Warn

If you are wondering why there is no photo here, it is because to date, none have been found. But here is the research I've been doing on the mysterious Kate Warn, the first female detective in the United States. You will see how important genealogy and census records are when seeking the identity of a woman who remains to this day something of a mystery.

On January 28, 1868, a female detective known to history as Kate Warne—credited by her boss Detective Allan Pinkerton with helping to thwart the Baltimore assassination plot aimed at President Abraham Lincoln in February, 1861—died of pneumonia at 94 Washington Street, Chicago, Illinois. The fact that she breathed her last at Pinkerton's residence, was his protégé, the head of the first female detective bureau in America, and his alleged mistress is only part of the story. According to Pinkerton, she was the best of the best, an intrepid operative he trusted with his innermost secrets.

But her true identity, certainly confused by her aliases; Kate Warn, Kate Warne, Kate Warner, "Mrs. Barley," "Mrs. Cherry," "Mrs. Warren," and lastly as she lay dying with something close to her real name; "**Angie M. Warren**," has eluded Civil War historians, genealogists, and students of spy craft for one hundred and fifty years.

Researching the life and origins of a well-concealed spy is like entering a circus funhouse. There are distortions, mistruths, sleight of hand and eye but if one is lucky; a glimmer of truth.

I'm a Civil War author and researcher. I decided to try to find this elusive woman.

I've compiled the following research after combing through numerous census records, old newspapers, and various books by and about Alan Pinkerton and his detective/spies to arrive at my conclusions. I was aided by the diligent and gracious Aki Lew and Diane Lanigan of Graceland Cemetery, and had extremely helpful conversations with Rachel Dworkin, Archivist for the Chemung County Historical Society. Genealogist and author John Stewart has provided indispensable assistance.

Allan Pinkerton buried Kate Warn—her most common alias, and likely

her “nomme de guerre”—at Chicago’s historic Graceland Cemetery on January 30, 1868. According to Diane Lanigan, a docent with the Chicago Architecture Foundation which gives tours at Graceland; “In the original entry in the log book there is a handwritten entry on 1-30-1868; **Angie M. Warren.** {**Note to reader: Alan Pinkerton was likely the informant at her death. He had a thick Scottish brogue. Therefore the name “Warn” may well have sounded like “Warren.”**} Again, in Diane Lanigan’s words: “The date of her death was 1/28/1868. Her residence at death was 94 Washington Street, Chicago, IL. Cause of death is congestion of lungs. Her age was 38 years. The undertaker listed is Jas. W. Wright. Angie M. Warren is later recorded as **Kate Warn.**”

She lies next to the cenotaph (memorial marker), of Pinkerton’s prized and much lamented spy Timothy Webster (executed by the Confederates in Richmond on April 22, 1862). Timothy’s remains lie with Pinkerton’s family in Onarga Illinois,

Etched on Kate Warn’s weathered headstone are these words; at least the ones that are legible:

In Memory of Kate Warn
Born in Chemung County, N. Y.
Died in Chicago January 28, 1868

The rest of the inscription, no doubt a loving and adulatory tribute by Pinkerton, is so worn by wind and time it must await a cemetery visit, a sheet of onion skin, a tracing and a sharp eye.

Pinkerton wrote a lot about the woman he called Kate Warne; this self-styled young “widow” who’d come to his Chicago office somewhere between 1856 and 1858, having the cheek to answer his want ad for a detective; not a clerk or secretary as would have been usual and acceptable for the time. He told her needed the night to ponder this unusual request. She assured him she’d be perfect. As a woman unafraid to “worm out confidences” from the wives of suspected traitors, criminals and their husbands or cohorts, he must give her a chance. By the next morning, he’d made his decision, and from that day forward, never regretted it.

But who was she, really?

{A note to my readers: Pinkerton’s writings are often embellished, partly fictionalized, or overblown and should be taken with hearty pinches of salt.}

The woman known as Kate Warn’s tombstone records that she was born in Chemung County, New York. A death notice in the *Philadelphia*

Press in 1868 notes that she was thirty-eight years old; suggesting she was born in 1829 or 1830.

At the time of her birth, the township of Erin was in Tioga County, not Chemung. In order to determine if there were in fact any Warns in Tioga, I first went to the 1830 census. There I found Israel Warn in Erin, Tioga County in with a wife and daughter under the age of five. The 1830 census only records heads of households, unnamed wives, the numbers of male and female children and their relative ages. I picked the Warn household up again in the 1835 Southport, Chemung County census, with the right number of children, and again in Southport in 1840.

“A Genealogy of the Warne family in America” lists Samuel Warn and Susan Shedd as the parents of Cornelius Warn, an engineer from Connecticut, twice married. His first wife was Eleanor and his second wife was Sarah Kinyon. Cornelius fathered Israel, Robert, Isaac, Susan, and Mary. Israel is described as a blacksmith who went “from New York State to Wisconsin ...” Israel’s children of record were Allen, John, Mahala Ann, Germanda, Henry, and Lucy.

A note to the reader: It is not certain that these names are accurate as the family records are often based on recollections or very old, illegible records. Therefore the name Mahala may have been recorded in error.

I did find the Warn family coming out from Chemung to Illinois, via Wisconsin, eventually living in the township of Dixon, in Lee County, Illinois. In the 1850 census we find Israel Warn, Blacksmith, age 49, born New York with the following children: Amanda, Allen, Lucy, John, Henry, Laura, and Frederick, all born in New York.

The 1860 Nelson, Lee County, Illinois census (taken in June of 1860), records the following family members in the Warn household:

Israel P. Warn, 53, farmer, born Connecticut.

Angie M. Warn, 29, born New York

Lucy A. Warn, 26, born New York

Henry Warn, 19, born New York

Belle Warn, 16, born New York

George Warn, 8, born Wisconsin

Dianna Campbell, servant, 24, born New York

Frank Warn, 3, Born Wisconsin

George Warn was born ca 1852, in Wisconsin after the move from New York. The servant, Dianna Campbell married Israel Warn on July 15, 1860. His first wife Elizabeth probably died in Wisconsin.

Following the records of the woman known as Kate Warne led me to believe that Angie M. (Mahala) is the female detective of Pinkerton fame. Diane Lanigan at the Graceland Cemetery told me that Kate Warn's first name was later recorded as "Angie M. Warren." The other Kate Warn in the 1860 household is an ongoing research project.

There is another census recording in Cook County taken six weeks later in July of 1860. It records a "Mrs. Warren" living with two other women, Jane Smith and Mrs. Crawford, no occupations listed. Apparently the woman known as Kate Warne supervised other female spies for Pinkerton, acting as a kind of dorm matron and trainer. I believe "Mrs. Warren" is Angie M. Warn. It is logical to assume that she would not have given her true name in the 1860 Chicago census, as her cover would have surely been blown.

And so I have concluded the following:

Angie M. Warn, likely born Mahala A. Warn was in fact Kate Warn, "Mrs. Warren," and "Angie M. Warren," Alan Pinkerton's prized spy, Kate Warne. Her various incarnations and escapades will be covered in detail in another article.

Author's note:

Recently I've found record of another Pinkerton operative, one Kate (Kitty) Prescott Brackett. Kate ... again. She died in 1867 and is buried in a common plot in Graceland that Pinkerton purchased for employees who had no family. Is this Kate the elusive Hattie Lawton (H.H.L. in the agent's reports) the Pinkerton spy who was stationed with Timothy Webster in Perrymansville, Maryland and later posed as Webster's wife as he awaited execution in Richmond?

Yes, Pinkerton wrote about Hattie, or Carrie Lawton, an impossibly beautiful young woman he memorialized in his unreliable memoirs. But to date, no researchers have been able to find any record of her by that name, or the initials, "H.H.L.," for that matter.

The hunt continues.

Some years back, my mentor Lincoln scholar Dr. James O. Hall introduced me to "Hattie," a spy he'd been seeking with all the diligence and passion he gave to his countless projects. I'm promised him I'd keep trying. And I will. Great thanks to my associate, author and genealogist John Stewart for joining in the chase.