

Mary Coolbaugh Fuller, Thwarted Concert Pianist

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Left: Mary Coolbaugh Fuller as she was sketched in 1898 for the *Oregonian*, May 22, 1898¹; Right: One of the rare photographs of Mary C. Fuller. Seen with her half-sister Grace (top), Mary had curly brown hair according to her 1888 passport application. This photo must date prior to 1893 when Grace died. From the Fuller papers in the Chicago Historical Museum

Mary Ellen Coolbaugh Fuller, known as Mamie by the family, was born on March 17, 1867, the eldest child was Melville Fuller, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, and Mary Ellen ("Mollie") Fuller. She seems to have been conceived on the Fullers' honeymoon in Europe and was the first of seven daughters and two sons that Mollie gave birth to. She is said to have been her father's favorite child. Brilliant, headstrong, chronically ill and a thwarted concert pianist, she provided both great joy, pride, and perplexing grief for her prominent and ever-wary parents.

Mary, who habitually deducted a year from her birth year, was educated in private schools in Chicago but exhibited a musical talent at an early age. In an interview she gave in 1895, a few days after she made her debut in Washington, she said that there had always been music in the house when she was growing up.² She undoubtedly received private piano lessons in Chicago, although the names of her early teachers are unknown.

Mary and her half-sister Maud, who was three years older than herself, went to Europe in 1883,³ possibly chaperoned by a member of the family. In 1878 their uncle James Coolbaugh died, leaving money in a trust for the four older daughters of the Fullers (Grace, Maud, Mary and Jane),⁴ so even though their parents were rich enough to afford their trip, they would have had funds of their own to draw upon. A gossipy oral memoir about the family, related by Henry

Crittenden Morris,⁵ says that they stayed with the Morris family in Vienna on this trip, and that the Fullers had sent Mary to Europe in order to distract her from a romance she had struck up with a forty-year-old butcher who had a shop on Cottage Grove Avenue, not far from their home on the south side of Chicago. He remembered that once in Vienna, Mary had walked out of the house with a red umbrella and soon a large crowd of young men were following her. Clearly, she was an attractive person from an early age. It may have been on this trip that she first thought of studying music abroad.

Musical Training in Europe

In August 1887 she went to Europe again, this time to pursue her music studies, possibly to begin studying with the brilliant teacher Moritz Moszkowski.⁶ A celebrated composer, pianist and conductor, he taught at Theodor Kullak's Neue Akademie der Tonkunst, the largest private music school in Germany, and Mamie enrolled as a student there soon after when she was twenty years old. She continued to study with him until 1892, with breaks in Chicago and Washington, where her parents had moved after he was confirmed as chief justice of the United States in July 1888 and sworn in the following October.

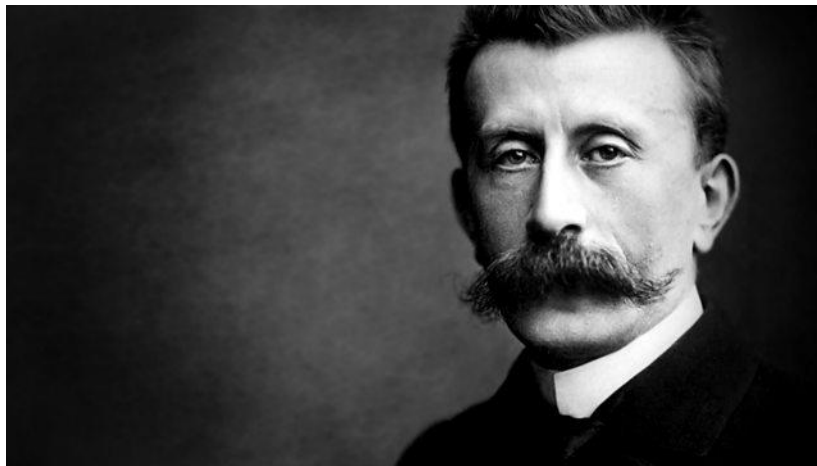
Mamie had spent the summer of 1888 in Chicago with her parents, and in September, she and her mother went to Washington to inspect the house that the chief justice had rented for their initial stay in the city. It was known as “Belmont Mansion,” a huge new residence built on Columbia Heights overlooking the city on 14th Street built by Azmi Barber, known as the “asphalt” king. Mollie and Mamie visited the property at night, having been let into the house by Eugene Brooks, the African American Washingtonian who would become the “messenger” or body-servant” of the chief justice when he settled in. As Mollie wrote to Mel about the trip after they had visited the place, she and Mamie concurred the house had a pretty view. “Mamie said for moonlight strolls it surpassed 3600,” a reference to their address in Chicago.⁷ Perhaps at Mamie’s insistence, she noted the small grand piano was gone, “but I say good riddance.” The Fullers seem always to have grand pianos in their houses, and they would have hired a better one for Mamie and any other of their daughters who liked to play.



Belmont Mansion, the first home of the Fullers in Washington, 1888-1889.
The opulent house had been built for Azmi Barber, the “asphalt king.”
It sat high on Columbia Heights with a striking view of the city.

Once installed as chief justice, newspaper reporters were eager to catch a glimpse of the Fuller family, and a long report on them appeared in the *Evening Star*.⁸ A sentence of two was provided for each of the chief justice's many daughters. For Mamie, they focused on her unusual musical training.

Miss Mary has a decided genius for music. She has already given a year to the study of the melodious art at the conservatory of music in Berlin. And the day after New Year's the brave young woman will take a steamer with only such acquaintances as she may meet, to rejoin her friends at Berlin., where her old apartments are awaiting her, and will devote the next two years to the cultivation of her gift.



Moritz Moszkowski, Mary Fuller's teacher at the Neue Akademie der Tonkunst, Berlin (aka Berlin Conservatory). Image: Wikipedia

Mary did return to Germany in February, and in May 1889, applied for a passport to return to the U.S. Here, her height was listed as 5'3", her eyes blue, and her hair brown and curly. She indicated in the interview with the passport officer that she expected to spend the next three years in Germany on her studies.⁹

After four years of study, but expecting to continue a fifth year, Mamie returned to the United States in 1891, spending time in Washington and Chicago. She went with her parents to a marine concert at the White House in June 1891,¹⁰ and then left with her parents to spend the summer in Chicago. She was spotted with her sisters around town, and the special correspondent of the *Evening Star* named "H. M." added,¹¹

Miss Mary is in excellent health and is likely to be the belle of the Supreme Court circle next winter. The Fuller girls are very popular, and if possible they get more attention here than they do at home in Washington from the sterner sex. If any of the young gentlemen read these lines, whom I know very well to have gone to the chief justice's house to spend an evening with the young ladies, only to find that a dozen or so other men were already on hand with the same intention, they will the better appreciate what I mean.

Those kinds of comments were stereotypical of the time when young women were not expected to have careers or to achieve any distinction other than being attractive to men and attaining suitable marriages. The challenges that Mamie faced as she pursued a career in music were even more formidable in the world of music where female artists were a rarity.. Her parents' social status near the top of Washington society meant that whatever she did would attract the glare of attention.

During time she spent in Washington in 1891-1892 with her parents, Mamie was introduced to a young man from South Carolina named Colin Manning. He was the youngest son of the former governor of South Carolina John L. Manning, one of the wealthiest slavers in the South before the Civil War. Colin came to Washington to work as the private secretary of Senator Matthew C. Butler of South Carolina and take law classes at Georgetown. The two formed an attachment. When Mamie returned to Berlin in the fall to continue her studies, she fell ill and may have asked Colin to join her.

The Fullers were not happy with this idea, and Mollie Fuller went to Berlin in February 1892 to take care of her daughter. Newspaper reporters caught whiff of the story and decided that the Fullers disapproved of Manning and wanted to stop the marriage. Once in Berlin, Mollie thought it best to take Mamie to southern Europe where she might recuperate from her undiagnosed illness, and the three of them, including Colin, arrived in Rome where, it is said, the couple decided to be married, with Mollie's consent. Mollie returned to Washington and, aware of the stories circulating about the wedding, went into full damage control mode and contacted reporters at both the *Daily Inter-Ocean* (Chicago) and the *Evening Star* (Washington) to "express her sorrow" that such a misunderstanding about the marriage had arisen and that it had their complete approval.¹² Not too long after that, Mamie and Colin returned to Washington where they stayed with the Fullers, then living in a large newly rented house with many bedrooms and plenty of space on Massachusetts Avenue, corner of 18th Street.¹³ Mamie continued to be in ill health – her sickness became recurrent and was never identified – and it may have been a reason for the difficult pregnancy she had, resulting in the death of a baby girl who was born on the last day of November.¹⁴

None of these later developments were disclosed to anyone outside the family. The family let it be known that Mamie had fallen ill after her return from Europe and that her sickness had forced her to remain in bed much of the time. In March 1893, when news broke about the death of the chief justice's eldest daughter, Grace, following the birth of a child, it was mentioned in passing that Mary Fuller was still ill.¹⁵ Even as late of November, the *Evening Star* was reporting that she was still suffering from her illness, and had been for the last eighteen months.¹⁶ But, according to divorce papers filed in Washington in 1898, Colin deserted her in June 1892.¹⁷ He seems to have retreated to his family's home in Sumpter, South Carolina. In March 1894 he was reported to be applying for a position as consul in Rouen;¹⁸ but in 1894, under pressure from the chief justice, Cleveland appointed him American consul in Fayal, Azores. According to Henry Crittenden Morris's account, Fuller had gone to President Cleveland and asked him to have Manning appointed consul to one country or another. Cleveland is said to have responded, "I suppose you want him as far away as possible?" "Yes," the chief justice replied. Cleveland said there was an opening in the Azores....

Launching a Concert Career

When her health improved in 1894, Mamie returned to Chicago where she had friends and acquaintances and resumed working on her piano. She may have stayed in the family home on Lake Avenue or taken an apartment in Michigan Avenue, where she is found in the 1900 census. During her last year in Berlin, Mamie may have met another young American studying music there named Fanny Losey, a violinist, and when they found they were both in Chicago during the summer, they decided to team up for a musical evening at the Fullers' home. Fannie had studied with the violinist Henryk Wieniawski, another famous teacher with many foreign students. They also asked Fannie's sister, Josephine, an alto, to join them. The musical evening proved very popular, and more than a hundred guests attended to hear the young musicians play a concert of Hayden, Chopin, Moszkowski, Liszt and Wieniawski.¹⁹ The inclusion of pieces by Liszt, Chopin and her teacher in Berlin shows that Mamie was aiming to display her technical mastery at the piano as well as paying homage to her many years of study in Berlin. A few days later the trio were invited to give a short recital at the Douglas Club, a private member's only club.²⁰ Mamie and Fanny Losey would continue to play together in the coming year, and perhaps they remained friends for many years after.²¹

Variations.....	Haydn
Miss Fuller.	
L'Absence.....	Bazzini
Song.....	Chopin-Taborowski
Miss Losey.	
2 Etudes	Chopin
Idylle.....	Jensen
Miss Fuller.	
Der letzte Gruss	Levi
Der Fischer Knabe.....	Deppe
Spring.....	Franz
Miss Josephine Losey.	
Barcarolle.....	M. Moszkowski
Au bord d'une source.....	Liszt
Miss Fuller.	
To the birds.....	Jensen
Wiegenlied.....	Hildach
Miss Josephine Losey.	
Legende. }	
Mazurka. }	Wieniawski
Miss Losey.	

The program at the Douglas Club, as given in the *Daily Inter-Ocean*, September 16, 1891

Mamie also formed a friendship with another artist in Chicago named Emily Hutchinson who had studied several years in Vienna with the Polish pianist and teacher Theodor Leschetzitsky. Many Americans went to study with him, including the daughter of Mark Twain, Clara Clemens, and the pianist and teacher Ethel Newcomb. He was perhaps best known as a teacher and patron of Paderewski, the wildly popular Polish pianist, already immensely popular with American audiences. Both Mamie and Emily were Chicagoans. With Emily's willingness to perform with her – at least initially – Mamie decided to launch a career as a concert pianist. The family, Morris believed, hired an agent for her, and two concerts were planned – one, a preview in Washington at the home of her parents in early January 1895, and a formal debut in Chicago several weeks later, with a second solo concert shortly thereafter. In Washington, she

gave an interview to a local newspaper reporter after the concert and spoke very grandly about her career and her wide circle of musical acquaintances. The interview was buried on page 10 of the paper: “Miss Fuller’s Ambition: Daughter of Chief Justice Will Tour: First Appearance This Month: This Opening Concert Will Be in Chicago With a Miss Hutchins – Miss Fuller is Handsome and Possesses Ability – She was Once Mrs. Aubrey But Will Resume Her Maiden Name.”²² (Note: the reporter got her husband’s name confused with that of another of the chief justice’s daughters’ husbands). She met the reporter on a rainy and dark day in the parlor of the Fullers’ home on Massachusetts Avenue, where the grand piano was located:

“I am Mary Fuller,” she said, as she swept her hand swiftly over the ivory key. “I have my former name and will be known by it in the future. I have adopted it and it will be the one under which I will pursue my professional career....”

“I really don’t remember when I did begin to study music. It seems that ever since I could first remember to have been playing....

“I have heard Paderewski play and have also listened to Walter Damrosch. Paderewski and I are great friends, and I am very fond of him.... My taste in music runs to that of the masters of harmony and such writers as Chopin and Gounod. ... For society I care nothing.”

The reporter continued, “Her whole air is one that reminds one of her father, and in the square-face and determined look in the blue eyes there is plenty of resolution that will enable the daughter of the highest officer in the land – excepting the President – to find her way to fame and fortune. There is no doubt that she could have remained in comfort at her father’s home, but she doubtless prefers to find her own way in the world.”



THE MARY FULLER.
The sketch of Mamie accompanying the interview
in the *Washington Times*, January 13, 1895

A few days earlier, she and Emily gave a formidable concert. It was a fundraiser that Mollie Fuller had organized to benefit one of her favorite charities, the St. John’s Orphanage,

then located at 1922 F Street – a block down the street from the home they would move into the following year. The concert included the Bach concerto for two harpsichords (pianos, in this case), and the Schumann Variations Op. 46 for two pianos, and the Saint-Saens Variations on a Theme of Beethoven. In the second half of the program, Fanny Losey performed the Fantaisie brillante sur des motifs de l' Opéra Faust de Gounod by her teacher Henryk Wieniawski, and Hungarian dances by Jeno Hubay.

The Chicago *Daily Inter-Ocean* sent a reporter to cover the recital, since the Fullers and Miss Hutchinson were well known in the city. He commented that the event had been both a financial and artistic success. “The rather ambitious attempts of the two young women in selecting the C major concerto of Bach met with the fullest appreciation and held the attention of the audience from beginning to end.... Both the Schumann variations and the Beethoven Saint-Saens showed the excellent training and musical feeling these girls possess. Miss Losey is no longer a novice, and has only demonstrated once more what she can do with her violin. Her sureness of technique and rhymical rendition of the Faust fantasie and the Hubay Hungarian dances were enthusiastically applauded.”²³



Emily Hutchinson Crane Junkin (1869-?) who performed in 1895 in Washington and Chicago with Mary Fuller.

Before Mamie and Emily returned to Chicago for their major debut, Mollie Fuller took them and several of their musical friends to a concert by the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Washington's Metzerott Music Hall followed by a late-night supper at their home.²⁴ Then they boarded a train to Chicago for their debut concert on the January 17th at the Central Music Hall. As the reviewer of the *Chicago Record*, one of several accounts of the recital remarks, the concert was highly anticipated because both Miss Fuller and Miss Hutchinson were making their debuts and both were well known in Chicago for the training they had received abroad.²⁵ The program was the same as the women had performed in Washington earlier in the month. The reviewer in the *Record* commented:

The best specimen of ensemble playing of the evening was the performance of the Schumann variations, in which both pianists seemed to be more at home and to play with much greater unity of sentiment and precision than in the other works. Miss Fuller, who played the upper or primo passages in most of the numbers, exhibited a fine and occasionally dashing technique and in the closing number both pianists played brilliantly. There were a few lapses in the latter numbers, however, as in the Bach concerto, in which the execution was not as clear and finished as the intricate and florid music requires. What failings there were, however, were evidently of a kind of inevitable in the ensemble playing of performers not acquainted by long experience and practice. In the main the concert was distinctly successful as the liberal and deserved applause of the audience proved.



Central Music Hall, State and Randolph Streets, Chicago,
where Mary Fuller made her professional debut as a pianist in 1895.

In February, Mary returned to the Central Music Hall for another concert, this time pairing with César Thomson, a Belgian-born virtuoso violinist who had also studied with



César Thomson, who performed with Mary Fuller
in later performances in Chicago. Image: Wikipedia,.

Wieniawski and who received high praise from the (unsigned) reviewer of the *Daily Inter-Ocean*.²⁶ In the audience was Theodore Thomas, the German-born first conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.²⁷ As for Miss Fuller,

Mary Coolbaugh Fuller, the handsome young pianist, who made her debut a few weeks ago as an ensemble player, appeared last evening as a soloist. She is an earnest, methodical, and correct, but brilliancy and breadth [mentioned in reviewing Thomson] are not yet apparently in her grasp. Rameau's gavotte and variations was a good reading but strong or finished phrasing was not marked. As an encore she gave Moszkowski's "Caprice" in charming fashion. Subsequently, she gave a Chopin impromptu, F sharp major, and Moszkowski's minuet, G major.... Mr. Thomson, Miss Fuller and Miss Torrey will present an entirely new programme Saturday afternoon.

If Mamie did perform later in the week, it was not covered. In fact, after the debut and initial concerts in January and February, Mamie did not undertake a world tour and seems to have stopped performing in public – at least no other reviews of her concertizing can be found – and given her prominence as the daughter of the U.S. Supreme Court chief justice, they would have been. Sadly, the conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra didn't ask her to perform with the orchestra. Mamie continued to be keen on music, but no longer as a public performer. Her health may have been a deterrent. Another piece of gossip in Henry Crittenden Morris's memoir that once she had collapsed at the piano "and could not go on." Whether this was at home or at a performance is unknown.

Post Debut Life

Mary bought her own apartment in Chicago²⁸ and traveled back and forth, as much as her health permitted, to see her parents in Washington or Sorrento, Maine, where the Fullers had a summer home. She was in Washington, for example, in January 1900 – probably after spending Christmas with the Fullers at their residence on F Street --- when her mother hosted fifty people, including Mary, to a lunch with their house guest, Jeannette Durno of Chicago, and later took them all to a concert at which she sang and played. Miss Durno had studied with Leschetizky in Vienna and had a long career as a performer with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra – the sort of career that Mamie must once have hoped for.²⁹

Mamie may have asked her mother to look after other up and coming musicians in Chicago and other cities when they were visiting Washington. Katherine Linn, a "brilliant pianist," had also studied with Moszkowski was another friend of Mamie's, who came to Washington in 1898, and Mollie introduced her to Washington audiences in a 'musicale' at her home.³⁰ She was so well liked that Mollie asked her to stay until the end of the month to greet and perhaps play for an annual reception to which as many as 600 people attended. The Fuller daughters were in the receiving line with Katherine, and Mamie may have been among them.³¹

Mamie's personal life since her failed 1892 marriage to Colin Manning ended was unnoticed in the newspapers. But in 1901, she and William H. White took a boat from Chicago across Lake Michigan to the town St. Joseph in Berrien County to be quietly married. The town was famous among Chicagoans for "quickie marriages."³² William was forty-four at the time and gave his occupation as "clerk" on the marriage certificate; Mamie was thirty-three and did not list an occupation.³³ She gave her father's name as "M. W. Fuller:" perhaps the couple were

not anxious for her identity to be known. Little is known about him, or what Mamie told her parents about him when she visited them in Sorrento the following year.³⁴

The last decade of Mary's life is largely unrecorded. For almost two decades she and her parents had tried in vain to have her illness diagnosed and treated. Mamie may have spent many months bedridden or housebound. However, in 1906, she returned to Washington to be the "maid of honor" at the surprise wedding of her youngest sister Fanny to Dr. Robert French Mason in the chief justice's home on F Street.³⁵ Mamie died in Chicago in 1910, noticed only by a Chicago newspaper,³⁶ leaving \$500 of her estate to her husband, \$250 to a woman who had taken care of her, and personal belongings to her favorite niece, Molly Beecher (1898-1983), the daughter of her sister Catherine – "all my clothing, jewelry, ornaments, books, pictures, furniture, silver house furnishing goods, equipment in my apartment and my Steinway piano now in possession of Mrs. Catherine White, of Chicago." Of the money due from her mother's estate, \$1000 was to be given to each of her nieces, including Molly, and the residue, if anything was left, to Molly.³⁷ She was buried in the Fuller plot at Graceland Cemetery in Chicago.

The following year, on December 18, 1911, under unknown circumstances, Mamie's unnamed baby, who had died in 1892, was interred in the space next to hers.³⁸

¹ No clear photograph of Mary C. Fuller has been found, despite her prominence.

² "I really don't remember when I did begin to study music. It seems that ever since I could first remember to have been playing...." *Washington Times*, January 13, 1895, p. 10. She made her formal debut in Chicago the following week.

³ *Chicago Daily News*, August 22, 1883, p. 1.

⁴ Grace and Maud were Fuller's daughters by his first marriage.

⁵ Interviewed in 1946 by Willard King, the biographer of Melville Fuller. In the Fuller Papers in Chicago Historical Society. Kindly sent to me by Douglas Rook, author of *Calm Command: U.S. Chief Justice Melville Fuller in His Times, 1888-1910* (Thomaston, ME: Maine Authors Publishing, 2023), to whom I am grateful.

Morris was the son of John Morris, a long-time friend of the Fuller family from Chicago days onward, and had an office in the Fuller building. Henry Morris was a seasoned diplomat

⁶ *Chicago Record*, December 29, 1894, p. 3, announcing the forthcoming debut in Chicago.

⁷ Melville Weston Fuller Papers, Library of Congress, Family Correspondence, Box 1, File Fuller, Mary Ellen Coolbaugh (1874-1893), Molly Fuller to Melville Fuller, September 20, 1888. In Chicago their address was 3600 Lake Avenue, in the southside area now known as Bronzeville. Today Lake Avenue has been changed to South Lake Park Avenue.

⁸ *Evening Star*, December 22, 1888-12-22, p. 8.

⁹ Ancestry.com, U.S., Passport Applications, 1795-1925 for Mary C Fuller, Emergency Passport Applications (Issued Abroad), 1877-1907, 1888-1889, Volume 057: Germany.

¹⁰ *Evening Star*, June 1, 1891, p. 2

¹¹ *Evening Star*, Sep 2, 1891, p. 7.

¹² "The Fuller Family: Facts Touching the Marriage of Miss Mary Fuller to Mr. C. C. Manning": *Daily Inter Ocean*, February 19, 1892, p. 9; "Miss Fuller's Marriage: There Was no Opposition to It and No Objection to the Husband She Chose": *Evening Star*, February 18, 1892, p. 7.

¹³ Mannings return from Europe: *Evening Star*, March 30, 1892-03-30, p 3.

¹⁴ Ancestry.com, as listed in the Fuller family tree established by the Kaseman Meidinger Family.

¹⁵ (Chicago) *Sun*, March 8, 1893, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Evening Star*, November 11, 1893, p. 7.

¹⁷ "Mrs. Manning Divorced," *New York Times*, June 22, 1898.

¹⁸ *Darlington SC Herald*, March 2, 1894, p. 2.

¹⁹ *Chicago Herald*, September 20, 1891, p. 34.

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- ²⁰ On the Douglas Club in 1890, <https://chicagology.com/goldenage/goldenage056/>.
- ²¹ In 1895 Fanny joined the grand operatic company of Mme. Francesca Gutherine-Moyer as a violinist, and they had some 50 concerts booked that year including at the Academy of Music, Milwaukee: *Musical Courier*, issue of 21 September 1895, p. 20.
- ²² *Washington Times*, January 13, 1895, p. 10
- ²³ *Daily Inter-Ocean*, January 4, 1895, p. 1.
- ²⁴ *Evening Star*, January 9, 1895, p. 7.
- ²⁵ *Chicago Record*, January 18, 1895, p. 2.
- ²⁶ *Daily Inter-Ocean*, February 7, 1895, p. 6.
- ²⁷ *Chicago Record*, February 7, 1895, p. 3.
- ²⁸ 2505 Michigan Ave: *Chicago Record*, January 15, 1895, p. 12; when she died, she was living at 3238 South Park Avenue: *Chicago Daily News*, December 22, 1910, p. 21.
- ²⁹ *Washington Times*, January 24, 1900, p. 6.
- ³⁰ *Washington Times*, January 25, 1898, p. 6.
- ³¹ *Evening Star*, February 1, 1898, p. 5.
- ³² <https://www.michiganradio.org/post/100-years-ago-michigan-was-place-go-30-second-wedding>.
- ³³ Marriage certificate is posted on ancestry.com under the Kaseman-Meidinger Family Tree.
- ³⁴ *Pontiac Daily Leader*, June 6, 1902, p. 1. Mollie and Mamie had arrive in Sorrento several weeks earlier, sometime in May 1902.
- ³⁵ *New York Times*, June 26, 1906. The chief justice was unable to attend; the only guests were Fanny's sister, Mildred Wallace, and the groom's two sisters and a brother-in-law.
- ³⁶ *Chicago Daily News*, December 22, 1910, p. 21.
- ³⁷ The will is dated December 10, 1910, and is found on ancestry.com. It was Molly Beecher Genet who donated the family papers to the Library of Congress (i.e. the Melville Fuller Papers).
- ³⁸ According to the Graceland Cemetery records.