

ELIZABETH ALBERTA  
OAKLEY CHRYSLER  
1862-1951



*All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players.*

Shakespeare (*As You Like It*)

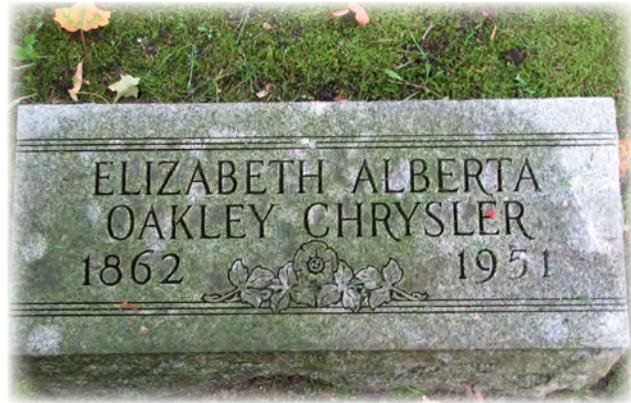
Elizabeth Alberta Oakley certainly made the most of her time upon the stage. In a time when most women spent their adult lives as local school teachers or housewives, Elizabeth spent a good amount of time on stage, literally, as a nationally known elocutionist and promoter of the Delsarte movement.

Looking back on Elizabeth's family history, one can see that adventurous blood ran through her veins. She was born August 5, 1862, in Ontario, Canada, to Arthur and Rachel Oakley. Elizabeth's mother was a strong Quaker woman who desired to help others and followed the belief that all people—men, women, and children—are created equal. Elizabeth's great-grandfather was governor general to the Bermudas and her great-great uncle was knighted for his bravery as general in the Canadian army, fighting back the advances of the Americans in the War of 1812.

In 1874, Elizabeth and her mother moved from Grand Rapids to the frontier town of Petoskey. Her mother was hired as Petoskey's first school teacher and Elizabeth was a student in the first class. In 1876, she returned to Grand Rapids with her mother to continue her education. Two years later mother and daughter returned to Northern Michigan and Elizabeth began teaching in Little Traverse (Harbor Springs).

In 1882, Elizabeth enrolled in Adrian College, most likely to study education. At this point she dropped the name Elizabeth and

the nickname, Libby, and is only referred to as Alberta. The name change seems to symbolize the shedding of her traditional life in Northern Michigan. For the next 20 years Alberta proved that an ambitious woman could go beyond influencing children in a one-room schoolhouse and expand to touch the entire country.



While at Adrian College, Alberta's outgoing personality was allowed to shine. She joined the Kappa Kappa Gamma Sorority, representing them at a national convention in New York in 1884, and penning songs for them as well. One of her songs, sung to the tune of *Annie Laurie* was published in 1889, in the book *Songs of the Kappa Kappa Gamma Fraternity* by Susan Goldsmith Kelly, Kappa Kappa Gamma, and Jessie Cougill.

1. Kappa Gamma, Kappa Gamma,  
Sweet sisterhood so true;  
For within her mystic circle,  
We pledge ourselves in blue,  
We pledge ourselves in blue,  
The blue of sky and sea;  
And for Kappa Kappa Gamma  
I'd lay me down and die.
2. Her grip is firm and earnest,  
Her challenge has no peer,  
Her call it is the sweetest,  
That e'er fell on my ear,  
That e'er fell on my ear,  
Her badge the golden key,  
And for Kappa Kappa Gamma  
I'd lay me down and die.
3. Like snow on the mountain lying,  
Her vows for aye endure:  
And her fame it is undying,

Her aims are true and pure,  
Her aims are true and pure,  
And she's the world to me,  
And for Kappa Kappa Gamma,  
I'd lay me down and die

Alberta Oakley

Upon graduation Alberta became a lecturer specializing in Browning and Shakespeare before serving as the head of the English Department at Hellmuth Ladies College in London, Canada from 1889-1894.

During this time Alberta was introduced to the Delsarte Movement, a system of vocal and physical exercises thought to better prepare people pursuing a career in the arts. Not only did this movement claim to strengthen the vocal range, but it also allowed speakers to communicate through body movements. Alberta became a nationally known speaker for the promotion of this movement, which she herself practiced in the classroom and at elocution conventions. The strong women (Mrs. J.A.C. Rowan, Mrs. David Cushman, Mr. H.O. Rose and others) she met in her early years at Petoskey certainly would have reinforced her belief that women are clearly not 'second-class citizens.'

Alberta's interest in the arts and education continued beyond the classroom. She held membership in the Ladies' Literary Club



RACHEL OAKLEY AND ALBERTA CHRYSLER  
PORTRAYED BY JUNE ZOERHOF AND MARY KATHERINE VALENTINE

of Grand Rapids as well as the National Association of Elocutionists, serving as a delegate to the Convention of Public Readers and Elocutionists in 1892, in New York. The following year she was written up in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* as having led a rejoinder to the topic *Evils of Imitation Teachers*. In 1895, Alberta was invited to New York with a group to consult with Rev. Dr. Charles Hoffman<sup>1</sup> about improving Christian education. While there she was one of two women selected to the Executive Committee of the newly formed Association for Promoting the Interests of the Protestant Episcopal Schools, Colleges, and Seminaries.

*Petoskey may have seemed a bit tame compared to Alaska and New York and national recognition, but Alberta seemed content to spend the rest of her life here. There was culture offered by the Bay View Association, and people such as Robert Ames, Petoskey's local Shakespeare authority to replace the 'society' she had left in New York. Perhaps she even gave informal after-dinner speeches or captivated some young children by reciting poetry (with all the flourish she had learned from the Delsarte method) from her front porch.*

In 1903, Alberta was offered the position of dean of women at Alfred University of New York. Six months later she resigned this university position to marry Captain Walter Chrysler, a ferry boat captain from Petoskey, and seemingly to follow the traditional life of a married woman. Instead of settling down, the Chryslers moved to Alaska where Captain Walter became a prospector and Alberta worked in missions and educational work.

Alberta returned to Petoskey in 1909, to care for her ailing mother. After the death of her mother in 1910, Alberta and her husband resided in Petoskey running a bowling alley and shooting gallery. She and her husband spent the next several decades contributing to the town of Petoskey. Captain Chrysler died April 5, 1941, at 86 years of age. Elizabeth Alberta Oakley Chrysler's time upon the stage ended August 19, 1951. She was 89.

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1 Rev. Dr. Charles Hoffman (1830-1897) was the rector of All Angels' Church in New York City. He and his brother were reputed to be the wealthiest clergymen in the country in 1873, each worth roughly \$15,000,000.

## OBITUARIES

### **Mrs. Chrysler, Noted Teacher, Expires Sunday**

Mrs. Elizabeth A. Chrysler, 89, widow of Capt. Walter Chrysler, died Sunday at her home at 801 East Lake street. Mrs. Chrysler, a nationally known platform lecturer, was widely known as an educator and was a teacher in the early Harbor Springs schools.

She was born August 5, 1862 in Ontario and came to Petoskey with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Oakley in 1874. Two years later they moved to Grand Rapids where she went through school.

At 17 years of age she returned to Northern Michigan and taught for three years in the schools at Harbor Springs, then known as Little Traverse. She entered Adrian College in 1882. She was in educational work for many years. For five years she was head of the English department in Helmuth Ladies' College in London, Canada. In 1894 she became principal of Bishop Thorpe School, a church school for young ladies at South Bethlehem, Pa.

Mrs. Chrysler was nationally known in the Delsarte Movement, a system of expression, both physical and vocal, that was used as preparation for a career on the stage and in movies. She was a member of the Ladies Literary Club of Grand Rapids and served for many years on the club's art and literary committee.

In May, 1903, Mrs. Chrysler was appointed as dean of women at Alfred University in New York. She withdrew to be married on Nov. 11, 1903, to Capt. Walter E. Chrysler. The following year they went to Alaska and while Captain Chrysler prospected she taught school. She also served as an assistant to Bishop Rowe and Arch-deacon Stock in mission work in Alaska.

After five years in Alaska, Mrs. Chrysler returned to Petoskey to care for her mother, and Captain Chrysler returned two years later. He died about two years ago.

Mrs. Chrysler was an active member of the Emmanuel Episcopal Church.

She is survived by two nephews, W.W. Wheatly of Lakeside, Calif., and Byron Wright of Harbor Springs.

Funeral services will be held at 3 p.m. Wednesday from Stones Funeral Home.

**Petoskey Evening News**  
**Monday, August 20, 1951**

**True Petoskey Pioneer, Capt. Chrysler, Expires  
Capt. Walter E. Chrysler, one of Petoskey's true pioneers, died peacefully last evening at his residence at 801 E. Lake street. He was 86 years old.**

For many years Capt. Chrysler operated the Little Traverse Bay ferry boats and, after leaving the water, was proprietor of a bowling alley and shooting gallery on Petoskey street.

Funeral services will be held Saturday at the Stone Funeral Home at 2 p.m. with burial in Greenwood. The Rev. Arthur G.T. Courtvan will have charge of the services.

Capt. Chrysler was born in Bay City September 7, 1860, and came to Petoskey with his parents, Capt. and Mrs. Philo Chrysler in 1873. They first settled in Little Traverse, now Harbor Springs, and until 1903 operated a ferry line on the bay.

**Started With Schooner**

Starting with an old sailing schooner, the father and son successively had "The General George W. Wool," "M.M. Wright," "The North Star," "The Walter E. Chrysler," "The Gracie Barker," "The Adrain" and "The Hazel," which was "The Gracie Barker," rebuilt after a fire.

Ferry boats were the best mode of transportation between communities around the bay and as many as 5,000 passengers a day were carried by the Chrysler boats.

While operating the ferry line, Capt. Chrysler built the Harbor Springs and Wequetonsing docks. He also served as mayor of Harbor Springs.

Following sale of the ferry line in 1903 Capt. Chrysler and Miss Elizabeth Alberta Oakley were married November 11, 1903. The following year they went to Alaska where he prospected for five years. During the last two years of their Alaskan experience Capt. Chrysler was in Episcopal church mission work, in charge of industry and erection of buildings. He worked under direction of the late Bishop Peter T. Roe, once of Petoskey.

About 1911 Capt. and Mrs. Chrysler returned to Petoskey where he began operation of a bowling alley and shooting gallery near the corner of Lake and Petoskey streets. He built the buildings now housing the Temple Theater and the Temple Café.

Capt. Chrysler became a member of the Masonic order in Harbor

Springs in 1881 and was a member of Emmet Chapter; R.A.M., and of the Tanana Masonic Lodge at Fairbanks, Alaska.

Surviving are his wife; a sister, Mrs. Minnie Stickney, of Traverse City; a niece, Mrs. Alfred Cain, of Detroit; and a nephew, Claude Wright, of Chicago.

**Petoskey Evening News**  
**Thursday, April 6, 1941**



