

*Lewiston  
History  
Mysteries*

# Local Sutherland Sisters Become World Famous For Their Tresses

## Vast fortune was made selling popular hair tonic

You could call them America's original model celebrities — more famous than the Presidents. When they spoke, their quotes would often appear on the front pages of papers across the country. Little did the seven barefooted sisters from

Cambria — Sarah, Victoria, Isabella, Grace, Naomi, Dora and Mary — think that doing chores on their small turkey farm would ever get them anywhere, let alone make them household names around the world. But they grew their hair, and kept growing it, until it swept the floor. Before long, they were touring the great theaters and venues, entertaining and enthraling crowds with their singing, stories and tresses. They could be considered Niagara County's most famous citizens of all time.

Reputed to have the longest hair in the world, the seven Sutherland sisters from Cambria, had hair with a combined length of 37 feet! Victoria had the longest hair at 7 feet. She refused an offer of \$2500 to cut off all her hair, but she did sell one strand of hair for \$25. Here is a photo with their father.



### Sutherland Sisters Timeline

**1845-1865:** The sisters are born on a small turkey farm on Ridge Road in Cambria which was started by their grandfather, Col. Andrew Sutherland.

**1867:** Their mother, Mary, dies and the girls are free of the foul-smelling oil their mother put in their hair to make it thick and strong.

**1870s:** The sisters start touring fairs and churches singing and playing musical instruments.

**1880:** Billed as the “Seven Wonders” the sisters debut on Broadway in New York City. Crowds would gasp as they let their hair down, shining under the stage lights. Their hair fell to the floor and some even thought it had magical powers.

**1882:** Contract is signed with the W.W. Coles Colossal Shows. A year later, their father, the Rev. Fletcher Sutherland, gets a trademark for a new hair tonic and starts a marketing campaign.

**1884:** The sisters join Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth. P.T. Barnum calls them “the seven most pleasing wonders of the world.” The hair tonic brings in \$90,000 the first year.

**1890:** They are worldwide celebrities and over 2.5 million bottles of the tonic have sold with sales over \$3 million (\$75 million in today's dollars.)

**1890-1907:** They continue to perform but their fortune gradually disappears — spent on parties, drugs and bad investments. In 1910, hair styles change and it becomes fashionable for women to have short hair.

**1946:** Grace, the last of the surviving sisters, dies at age 92, destitute. Most of the sisters are buried at Glenwood Cemetery in Lockport.

Capitalizing on his daughter's fame, the Rev. Fletcher Sutherland concocted a formula and began to sell the “Hair Grower.” People couldn't get enough of it and soon it was distributed

through a vast network of 28,000 dealers. The family became rich, at least for a while! A report in 1893 analyzed the contents and determined the tonic consisted of 56% witch-hazel water, 44% bay rum, with some salt, magnesia and hydrochloric acid.

### Is Lewiston Leader Related?

Could it be? Could Bruce Sutherland, the Deputy Mayor of Lewiston, actually be related to the famous sisters? Yes! Bruce is their 4th cousin, twice removed. Bruce said, “We could never figure out why that side of the family got all the hair. I'm still desperately looking for my bottle of the Hair Grower tonic.”



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