

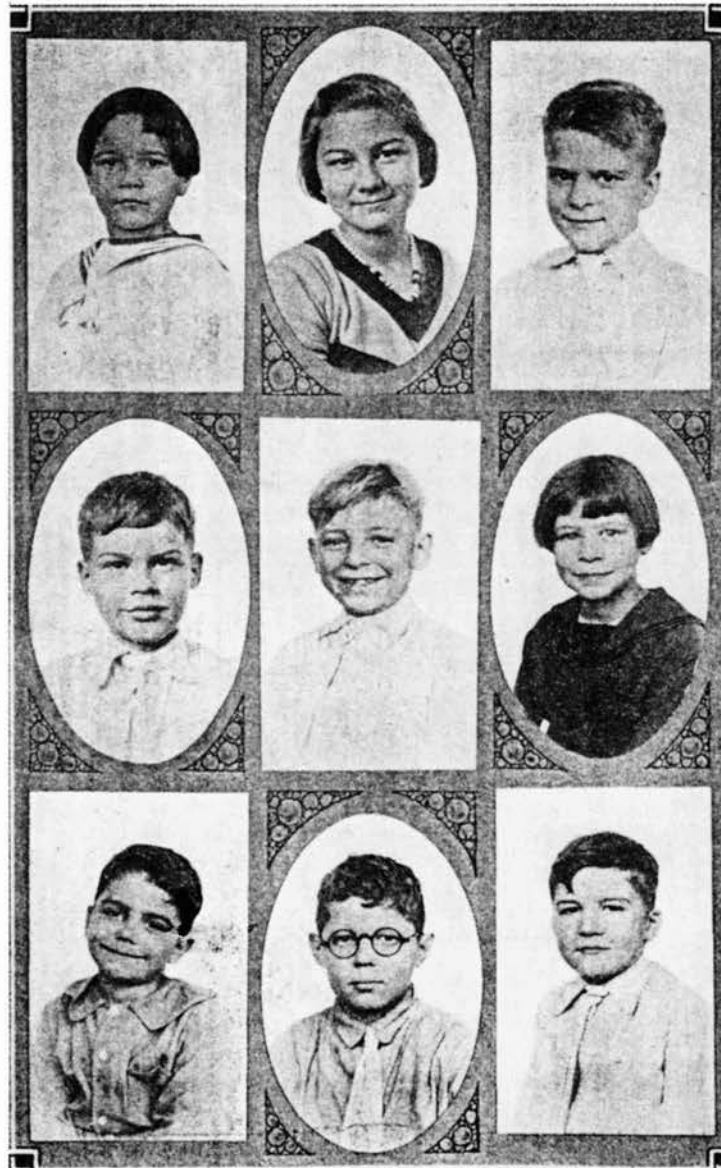
*The St. Lawrence County Historical Association*

# *QUARTERLY*

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*Volume XLIII - Number 2 - Spring 1998*

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**Society of United Helpers  
1898-1998**

## The St. Lawrence County Historical Association at the Silas Wright House

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a private, not-for-profit, membership organization based at the Silas Wright House in Canton, New York. Founded in 1947, the Association is governed by a constitution, by-laws, and Board of Trustees. The Historical Association's membership meets annually to elect its officers and trustees.

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### **Our Mission**

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a not-for-profit membership organization and museum which serves as an educational resource for the use and benefit of the citizens of St. Lawrence County and others interested in the County's history and traditions. The Association collects and preserves archival material and artifacts pertinent to the County's history. In cooperation and collaboration with other local organizations, the Association promotes an understanding of and appreciation for the County's rich history through publications, exhibits, and programs. The St. Lawrence County Historical Association operates within museum standards established by the American Association of Museums.

### **SLCHA Membership**

Membership in the St. Lawrence County Historical Association is open to all interested parties. Annual membership dues are: Individual, \$25; Senior/Student, \$20; Family, \$35; Contributor, \$50; Supporter, \$100; Patron, \$250; Businesses, \$50 to \$1,000. Members receive the *SLCHA Quarterly*, the Historical Association's bi-monthly newsletter, and various discounts on publications, programs and events.

St. Lawrence County Historical Association  
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(315) 386-8133

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Additional copies may be obtained from the St. Lawrence County Historical Association, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617 at \$4.00 each (\$2.00 for members), plus \$1.00 for postage.

**Contributions:**

*The SLCHA Quarterly* welcomes contributions. To submit a manuscript, or for further information, please contact the editor through the St. Lawrence County Historical Association. Please address communications to: Managing Editor, *The SLCHA Quarterly*, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617.

*The St. Lawrence County Historical Association*  
**Quarterly**

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**Issue Editor:**

*J. Rebecca Thompson*

**Cover Illustration:**

*Society of United Helpers*  
*1934 Annual Report*

**Corrections:**

*Volume 43, number 1*

We inadvertently removed Stan Maine's name from the list of Trustees on the inside front cover. We truly apologize for this error. Stan, resident of Pierrepont, is a long and faithful supporter of SLCHA, putting in many hours of volunteer work in several capacities.

We moved Herb and Mary Ruth Judd, of the Quarterly Advisory Board, from their real residence in Canton, to some unknown address in Pierrepont.

We misspelled Mrs. Dorothy Worzel's name in our St. Lawrence County's Northern Lights feature about her brother, Albert Crary.

*Volume 42 (Retrospective issue)*

We perpetuated an error in our reprinting of the article about the founding of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association. Jean Grimm, Town of Fine Historian, reports that Otto Hamele, our association's founder, was the supervisor of the Town of Fine, not the Town of Clifton as stated in the article.

*From the Editors*

## **Remembrance Day in *The Quarterly***

We are looking for documents—letters, service records, photographs—that tell stories of those who died in World War I. These individuals may have lived in St. Lawrence County or they may have been relatives of current residents of St. Lawrence County. We would like to create an issue from these documents that reminds us of that time and its impact on our lives.

Remembrance Day in England and Canada and Armistice Day in the United States began to be celebrated in the 1920s to honor the soldiers who died in the first World War, 1914-1918.

World War I was the “war to end all wars.” The United States joined the conflict late (not until 1917) in order to, in President Woodrow Wilson’s words, “make the world safe for democracy.” In hindsight, these sentiments seem naive and misplaced as there have been numerous wars around the globe since 1918, and democracy still struggles to find a foothold in many parts of the world.

And World War I was a particularly devastating war. Fought with nineteenth century tactics and twentieth century technology, it is estimated that more than eight million soldiers—young men—from many parts of the globe lost their lives. Civilian deaths also were high, estimated at about six million.

We would like to publish an issue of *The Quarterly* that remembers those who lost their lives in World War I and reconnects us to their lives and their sacrifice through our St. Lawrence County heritage.

If you have documents from the World War I period about a family member who died in the war we would be pleased to hear from you by telephone (315 386-8133), e-mail (slcha@northnet.org), or mail (Quarterly, c/o SLCHA, PO Box 8, Canton, NY 13617). In selecting material to include in the issue, we will choose those documents that we think best bring to life the individuals they represent.

**Let them not be forgotten!**

# Society of United Helpers: The First 100 Years

Written By  
**Jacqueline Hodges**  
**Cheryl Madlin**  
**Frank Pastizzo**

Compiled and edited by **J. Rebecca Thompson**

In the early 1800s, almshouses and poorhouses were all there were for the homeless and destitute in New York. Indigent, neglected, or homeless little children were placed into these institutions to be cared for by adult paupers. The only type of relief for orphaned and needy children was whatever compassion they could find from adults living in poorhouses. There was little public understanding of this social ill and little was done towards furthering the children's educational, moral, or physical development. In 1857, an investigating committee of the State Senate called attention to the terrible conditions in which these children lived. Over the next several years, a few counties in the state voluntarily removed children from local poorhouses and contracted with private orphanages for their care. But it was another twenty years before laws were finally enacted prohibiting the retention of children in almshouses.

The State Board of Charities, created in 1867 by an act of the Legislature, became a strong advocate for children and played a leadership role in efforts to get all children removed from poorhouses. Finally, in 1875, the Legislature passed what came to be known as the "Children's Law."

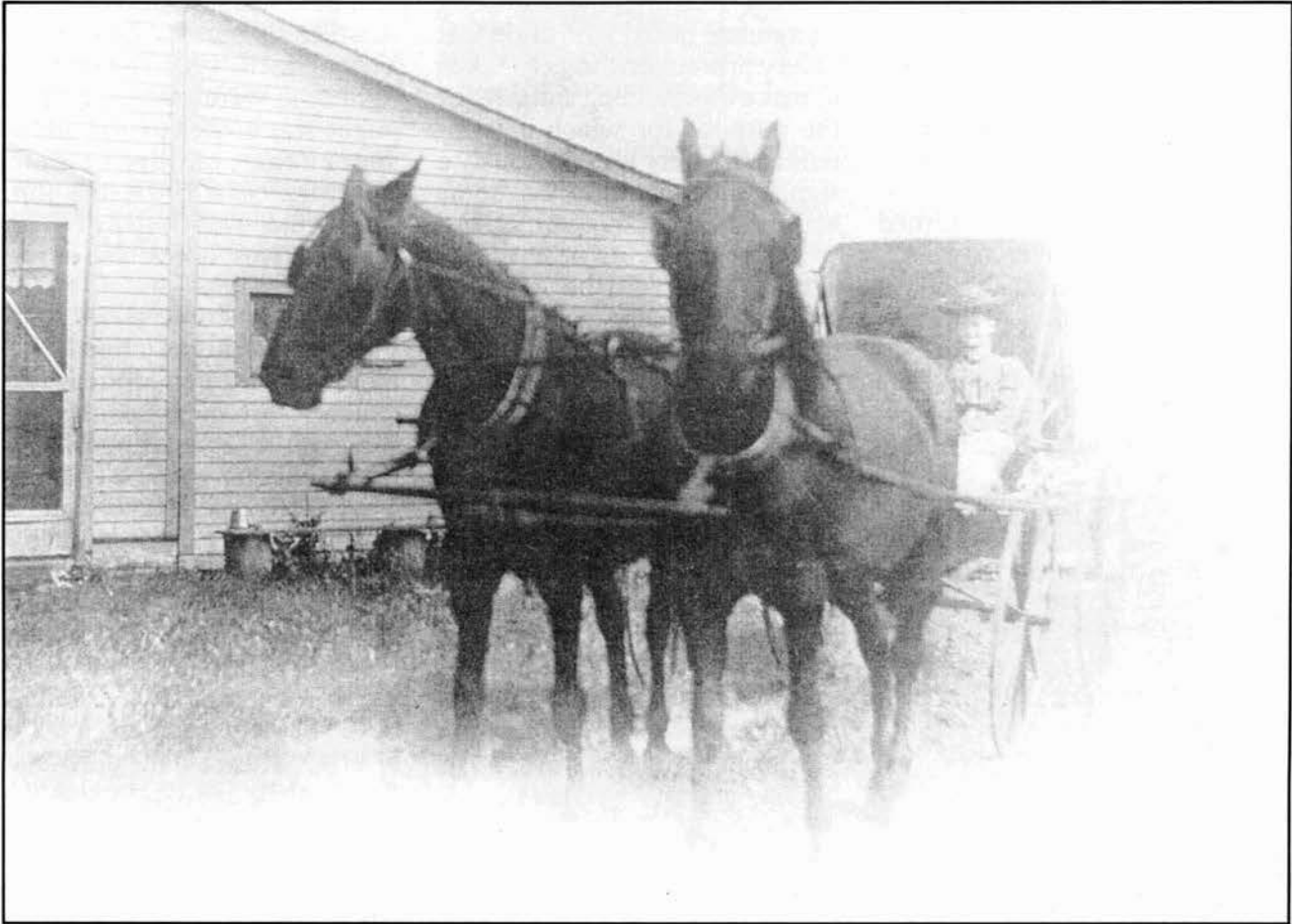
This law required that all children between the ages of three and sixteen be removed and excluded from poorhouses by January 1, 1876. St. Lawrence County established a public home for children in 1876, shortly after the Children's Law took effect.

In March 1876 St. Lawrence County's first privately organized relief effort began with the for-

mation in Ogdensburg of an organization known as Home for the Homeless. Ten ladies subscribed \$100 each and Mrs. J. S. Bean was elected president of the Board of Managers. This organization was a vast improvement over the poorhouse or county home environments and its creation set the stage for the public's concern and involvement in the care of children and homeless in



*Miss Henrietta Matheson  
First Treasurer of the Society of United Helpers  
1898-1905*



*Miss Alzina Milligan soliciting produce and canned goods.*

the County. During the first years, two children and six women were cared for.

In the spring of 1896, a law was passed by the New York State Legislature stating that orphans and children of Protestant parents should be cared for by Protestant institutions. There were no Protestant homes in St. Lawrence, Clinton, or Franklin counties. In early spring of 1898, a group of benevolent ladies of Ogdensburg met to address their concern with needy Protestant children and determined that an organization was needed. By April of that year, they had elected officers, decided upon a name, The Society of United Helpers, and drawn up

a constitution and bylaws. Each of the six Protestant churches of the City (Baptist, Congregational, Universalist, Episcopalian, Methodist, and Presbyterian) had representatives on the Society's Board of Managers. In November of 1898, the Board filed a Certificate of Incorporation and on February 22, 1899 the Certificate of Incorporation was approved by the State Board of Charities.

The Society of United Helpers wasted no time in setting about its mission. A house was rented at 22 Congress Street. A matron was hired, and the first child, a young boy from Potsdam, was placed in the Society's care on

May 4, 1898. By the end of the first year, twenty-seven children had been placed in the Society's care. Mrs. Alzina Milligan was United Helpers' first matron. She was a woman of sterling character; she was efficient, resourceful, and above all she had a motherly heart. She would often go into the countryside in her horse and buggy soliciting produce and canned goods to help fill the Home's pantry and the little children's stomachs.

In the early days, the children either were brought directly to the home by the county poormasters or were referred by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Animals, now

known as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals or the SPCA.

Within two years, over ninety children came through the doors of the home on Congress Street; and when children were turned away because of overcrowding, it became apparent that a larger home was required. A building committee was appointed to search out existing housing or the possibility of building a new building for these unfortunate children.

On June 19, 1900, the cornerstone for the Society of United Helpers Children's Home was laid at 1200 State Street on a two and one half acre piece of property that was purchased for \$665. In its report for the year 1900, printed in the Society's Second

Annual Report, the Building Committee noted with pride that "every precaution has been taken to make this building suitable for the purpose for which it is intended." Safety was obviously a significant concern as "the home was furnished throughout in hard wood ... and is as near as fire proof as it could be made..." Thought was also given to the comfort and health of the residents, since the plan called for "two hot air furnaces so located as to give the best results, and the ventilation of all rooms [was] carefully considered." Safety and comfort evidently were of greater concern than expense, since "the building is to be lighted by electricity and is wired in a thorough and workmanlike manner throughout, thus precluding all possibility of fire originating from the use of kerosene lamps."

The building was completed in less than six months; and on New Years Day in 1901 the doors of the home were opened and the public was invited to visit and inspect the children's new "HOME." In 1903, the third floor which was initially left unfinished was converted into a wing for babies.

The new home already had more than fifty children in residence. When it opened, one wing was reserved for newly admitted children because of a New York State health law requiring that any child taken into a children's institution be quarantined for ten days. These poor bewildered children could play, receive hugs from staff, eat in their own area, and be examined by the Society's doctors, but they had to wait to join the other children in their many activities.

One of the Society's main hopes and purposes from the very beginning was *not* to make the United Helpers Home a permanent residence, but to make it a place of temporary care and to return these children to their parents whenever possible. If this was not possible, the Society tried to find adoptive parents who would give the children the love, nurturing, education, religious training, and overall care that would make them fine, upstanding citizens of their communities. A conscientious Board and staff sought to insure that when the children were placed either back with their families or in adoptive homes, they were well prepared.

A number of children were taken by the Children's Aide Society in New York City where they were placed for adoption or sent west on the "orphan trains."



*The new "HOME" (1902)*



All these children were supervised by the Children's Aide Society to make sure they were placed in proper homes, properly fed, and not used like chattel. Many of the children lived with wonderful families who loved and cared for them as they would their own. The United Helpers kept in contact with the adoptive families, and it was seldom that a child was returned to the Home.

One child, sent west on an orphan train, was taken in by a well-to-do family in Colorado. The man wanted to adopt this child immediately, but the lady of the house was hesitant. Then the lady got quite sick. The little boy was sent to the store to get her medicine. He was given a quarter to spend for whatever he wanted. On the way home he saw some violets in a flower shop window and spent his twenty-five cents on violets for the sick woman. Needless to say, he won her heart by his thoughtfulness, was adopted by this family, and was dearly loved. When he was grown, he was a renowned member of state government, trusted and liked by all. A very happy ending.

Though the Children's Home was not intended to be a permanent residence, every effort was made to keep the atmosphere as much like a "real home" as possible. All the matrons and most of the staff lived at the Home. There was an apartment for the matron or superintendent and a small dining room for her use. The staff had rooms on the second floor and generally ate with the children.

There was a kindergarten in the home to teach the little ones, much like pre-school and day-care today. All the children of

school age went to the public schools. The children attended the church of their faith and also attended Sunday school.

All the children had chores and responsibilities. They had to keep their rooms neat, do homework, tend gardens, and collect eggs. As far as can be determined, there was no dress code in the Home.

The children celebrated all of the major holidays in the manner

duced 3500 eggs. A little boy, Gordon, wanted a garden, so he was given a bean plant for his very own. This little boy did everything to make this bean plant grow and flourish, but to no avail. A lady from Norfolk by the name of Mrs. Van Kennen was so taken with Gordon's story of the bean plant that she sent him a large amount of bean seeds. The next year, Gordon had a garden that was one hundred square feet, and took the prize given by the Kiwanis for his beans. Gordon



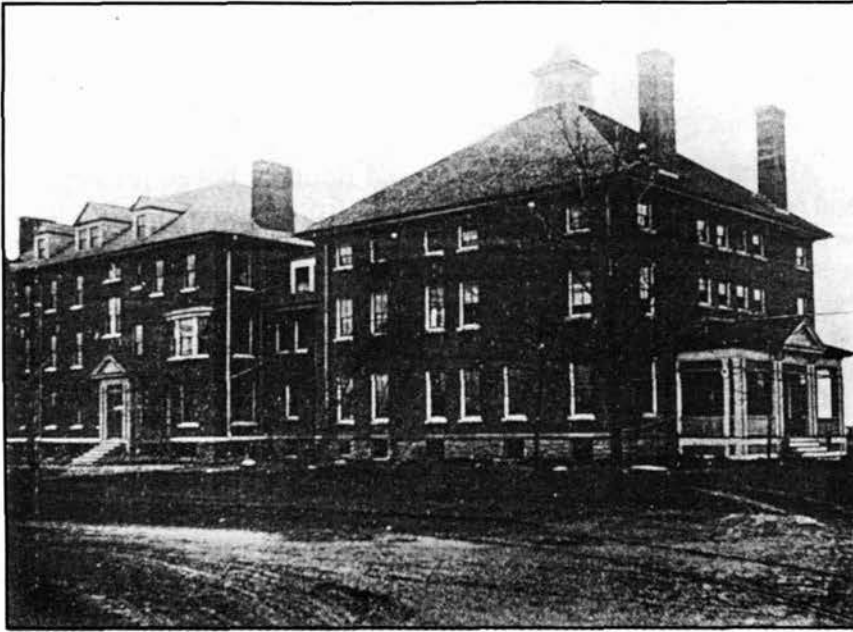
*"Some of our children." (1913)*

in which most families do. They had Christmas trees, Santa Claus visits, and presents under the tree. They made decorations, wrote letters to Santa, and acted as most children do at holiday times. There were sleigh rides, snow forts, and snow ball fights. These children were children. The ladies of the Society were always at the home, even Christmas morning to see the "family" open their gifts.

There were many activities within the Home: workshops, sewing for the girls, gardens, a hen house. One year the hens pro-

duced great acumen for disposing of his beans, and after selling two or three bunches of his home grown onions and beans to a neighbor for fifteen cents, threatened not to sell any of his produce to the superintendent if she didn't meet his prices. She bought the beans.

Dancing lessons were taught by volunteers, and a large playground for the children was provided by the Rotary Club and other fraternal organizations. Tickets to all the activities in the city were also provided, often by a Mr. Daniels of Ogdensburg.



*Home with annex completed in 1910*

The children attended the circus, carnivals, plays, movies, and operettas. They had boat rides, swimming lessons and swimming parties. They had trips to private camps and went to local birthday parties. The children belonged to the Boy and Girl Scouts, 4H Clubs, church clubs, and school clubs.

Of course there were problems. Some children ran away, either trying to get home, or just for fun. Some were chronic "escapers." This was always upsetting no matter what the circumstances. Most of the children were returned safely and remained in the home until they were either returned to their families, or adopted.

One little boy was asked if he'd like to go home. He said, "No. I like it here. At home we sometime don't even have a pickle to eat. My grandfather gave me a slice of bread and I shared it with my dog. My Grandpa hit me. But I didn't care, I couldn't let my dog starve,

could I?"

The community also provided the Society with several services. All trolley and taxi rides were free. Physicians provided free service to the children and later to the elderly who came to live at the home. The facilities of Hepburn Hospital were free to all residents of the home. Also, all dental and legal services were free. There is no clear record of when these free services ended, but it is believed to be in 1927 when the Social Services Department took over the placing of the children.

In 1902 the Ogdensburg cemetery generously donated a large cemetery plot to accommodate the children that died while residing in the Home. Most of the deaths were due to epidemics. Many children, especially babies, were suffering from acute malnutrition from which they never recovered. There were also a few tragic accidents.

Supporting the Home was an ongoing county-wide commit-

ment. In addition to the activities and services for the children described above, there were many other organized efforts to provide for the Home's needs. At the time United Helpers moved into the new home on State Street, auxiliaries were formed in communities around the county such as Canton, Waddington, Potsdam, DeKalb, and Lisbon. These auxiliaries were very conscientious about their duty to the children at the Home. They provided many things to help care for the children and to furnish the building. For example, when the new infant wing was established in 1903, it was the auxiliaries that saw that it was furnished. Money was raised from bazaars, church suppers, sewing circles, donation days, and other community activities. And community activities contributed more than just money. For example, in 1921, the April Bazaar at the Ogdensburg Armory not only brought in \$2000, but also thirty-five pounds of candy, 463 articles of clothing, eleven quilts, fifty cans of fruit, fifty tumblers of jelly and preserves, one half bushel of popcorn, five bushels of potatoes, ten pumpkins, fourteen heads of cabbage, thirteen bags of mixed vegetables, three quarts of maple syrup, nine quarts of pickles, and a bushel of apples.

All the local fraternal organizations supported the Society. The Golden Glow Girls and a group known only as the "Five Little Girls" were especially giving. They held such events as church suppers, bazaars, tag sale days, and rummage sales, all to help provide for the Home.

The generous outpouring of concern and caring shown to the Home was never more apparent than on Donation Day held



*The Home's younger residents (1936)*

every November. The Home received an overwhelming amount of produce from Ogdensburg and the surrounding communities. Donations from potatoes to coal to flour, sugar, wood for stoves, Thanksgiving turkeys, to canned goods were received. Donation day continued into the 1970s and some churches still remember the United Helpers at Thanksgiving.

The Home also received some income from fees. Each town and village paid a certain amount for the care of any of their children placed in the Home. Parents of the children who could afford to pay were also charged a fee.

In addition to caring for children, it was the vision of the Board to furnish a residence for "old ladies" and to expand the home to provide better care and more room for the children. In 1908, a new annex was proposed. Grand galas, dances, plays, socials, and bazaars were held to raise the needed funds to build the addition.

The new annex was completed in 1910 at a cost of \$23,473.54. It included a dining room, babies' room, and one "old lady's" room on the first floor. The second floor had a wing for the elderly, a large bathroom, a linen closet, and a delightful parlor. The third floor had more rooms for women, two

quarantine rooms, a large hospital room, and a small operating room for minor operations. Each floor had a large sun porch that all residents used. There were twenty-five new rooms in all, furnished in most part by contributions from local people and the auxiliaries.

At this time, rules for application and entrance requirements for elderly women were established. The admittance fee for the "old ladies" was \$500 and all property belonging to the applicant at the time of application. The applicant had to enter into an agreement at the time of her application not to dispose of any of her property during a six months probationary period. The first "old lady" was admitted in July 1910.

The Home continued to serve the children and elderly ladies of the county without many problems into the 1920s. World War I and the influenza epidemic of 1918 created demand for more



*The Home's older residents (1936)*

space to house children who were in need of care. The number of children doubled at this time due to the war, epidemics, inflation, and more broken homes. Though all the children in the Home came down with the flu during the epidemic of 1918, only two died, an infant, who was already very sick when she was brought to the home and a four year old boy.

In 1918 the Native American children who lived in the Home were sent to the Thomas Indian School at Iroquois, New York, one of the most splendid institutes for Indian children. At this time, United Helpers home enjoyed the distinction of having the widest age span in New York State, if not the nation, with an infant three days old and a ninety-six year old woman both in residence.

With some reluctance, the Board of Managers passed a policy in 1923 that read, "To improve the conditions in the Home, it is the decision of the management not to admit mentally deviant or incorrigible children." The



*Boys in the Home (1937)*

Board found admitting such children to be detrimental and unfair to the other children in their care.

In 1923, the Board of Managers again found "that the number of children we are called upon to care for has increased to such an extent, we find the present

building totally inadequate for the proper care of both children and old ladies ..." and that "it would be for the best interest of all concerned if we would build a separate building for the care of the old ladies, thereby making more room for the children." A resolution was passed authorizing "the President to appoint a financial committee to canvass the county for the necessary funds for that purpose, such canvass to be made in January 1923 or as soon thereafter as possible."

The committee consisted of several prominent citizens of the county: Felix Hulser, Chairman, Samuel W. Leonard, Treasurer, John Howard, Webb Griffith, Thomas Spratt, Julius A. Frank, and Edward Dillingham. There were thirteen members in all. The goal was \$75,000, but because of the generosity of the community and the surrounding areas over \$112,910 was raised.

The new wing was opened in February 1925. During the con-



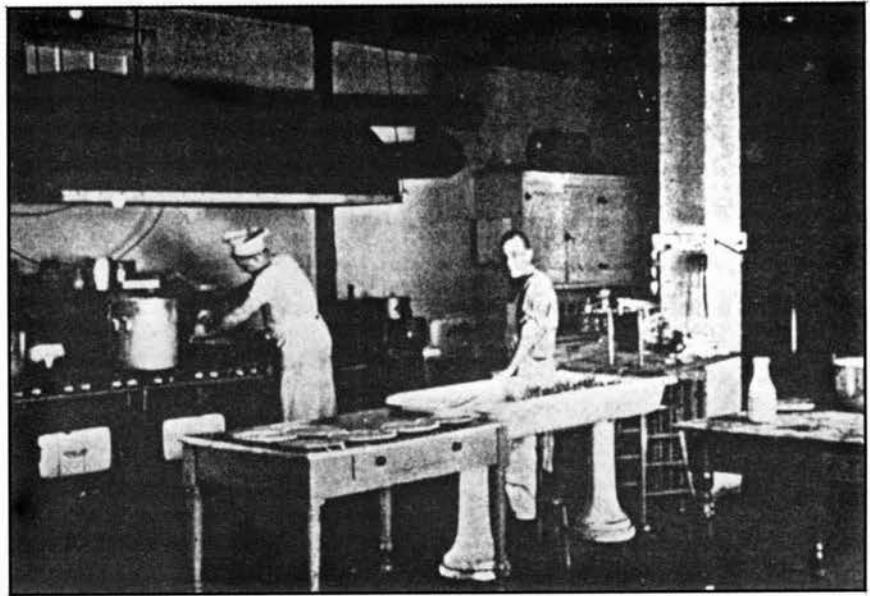
*Girls in the Home (1937)*

struction it was decided to house children in the new wing and so extensive renovations were made to the existing buildings to meet the needs of the women residents. When construction was completed, the Home was on a scale with the best institutions in New York State. It was three stories high and could accommodate up to 100 children with ease. The new wing contained a modern kitchen, leading directly into the children's dining hall. Next to the dining room was a double assembly room that could be made into two separate parlors by closing sliding doors. There was a quarantine room, nursery, children's rooms, and many other amenities. The residents of the Home lived in as home-like an atmosphere as possible and everything was done to maintain that standard.

Following World War I, there was renewed interest in child health and welfare. In 1920, the State of New York created the



1949

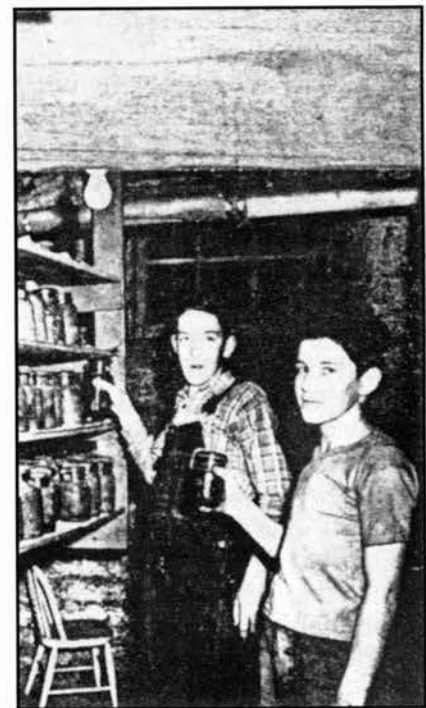


"The cook who bakes our pies." (1938)

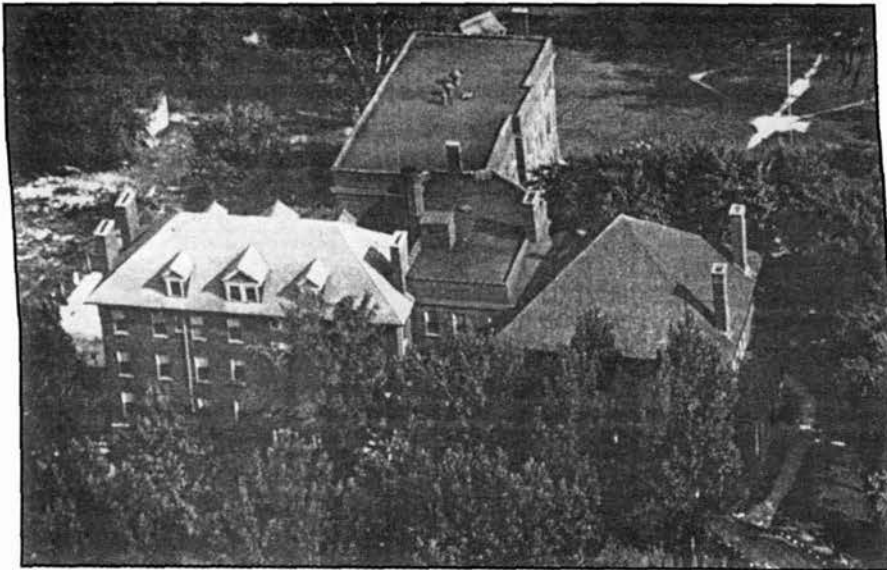
State Commission to Examine Laws Relating to Child Welfare. Ultimately this led to efforts to consolidate and centralize responsibility for the care of indigent and neglected children. Consequently, in 1927 a new Department of Social Welfare was established in St. Lawrence County to take the place of the Commission of Charities and the Poormaster. This significantly changed the role of the Society in caring for children. Children were placed in the Home solely through the Children's Court rather than through any other means. Once at the Home, the Department of Social Welfare was charged with insuring that the Home provided all things that were in the best interest of the child. The Society no longer had a role in placing children in adoptive homes nor could it supervise the care and well-being of the children after placement. Consequently, it seemed to many that the personal connection with the child that had continued over a

long period of years had been broken.

The 1930s brought a large influx of needy and destitute children and elderly women. How-



1949



*Aerial view (1941) shows the Home as it was when torn down (1972). Original home (1901) is lower right, annex (1910) is lower left, and wing (1925) upper center.*

ever, relatively speaking, these were rather quiet years. No new large projects were even considered. The Depression had a devastating effect on St. Lawrence County and the surrounding area. The ability of people to contribute to the welfare of the children and elderly was less than before, but the local communities still provided what they could. With its own gardens and the older residents, both women and girls, able to sew, basic needs were met with minimum hardship.

The 1940s saw another influx of children and elderly women due to the problems of split families and losses in families as a result of the Second World War.

No Board of Managers' minutes were printed between 1942 and 1946 due to a paper shortage, but it is known that the women and children had a large victory garden, sewed bandages for the army, made socks and scarves to send overseas, wrote

notes and letters of good cheer to the soldiers, and helped in any way they could.

It was a sad day in 1948 when the nursery which had been in existence for forty-five years was closed. The Social Welfare Department felt that it was better for the babies to be placed directly with foster or adoptive parents. The Board of Managers was not sure this was such a good policy, but were unable to change it. The wing that had formerly housed babies was turned into a young ladies department and the girls were delighted to have their own area.

During the 1940s the Society's finances were stretched to the limit and some years it operated in the red. As a result, an annual fund drive was inaugurated. The Edward J. Noble Foundation generously offered to contribute \$1,000 if \$5,000 was raised, or 20% of the amount raised over \$5,000. The results of the drive

were most encouraging, \$4,763 in cash, \$1000 from the Noble Foundation and many hundreds of dollars in new clothing, food, and equipment. Once again, the generosity of the local area was astounding.

The 1950s brought major changes to the Society. Foremost among them was the removal of children from the Home. Changes in child welfare policy mandated that children be placed directly in foster care rather than in institutional care. This must have been a wrenching event for many who had for so long been involved with caring for children. But the Society moved on—seeking other ways to meet the needs of the community. It was at this time that the first men were admitted as residents to the Home, making the Society a leading provider of care for the elderly.

Care of the elderly brought new concerns that needed to be addressed. In the 1960s, the Board saw the need to build an addition that would be a nursing wing. Plans were made to build on the existing lot, but matters were taken out of the Board's hands when a fire in the Home caused the evacuation of the residents. The residents were taken to the Pythian Home on the Morristown road and remained there for several days until repairs could be made to the old building. The handwriting was on the wall; the old building was obsolete and all the repairs in the world would not make it into a safe and useful residence.

A major fund drive was undertaken. Once again the citizens of the county and city came to the aid of the United Helpers. The Pythian Home property,

which was for sale, was purchased. The Ogdensburg Public School Board wanted the United Helpers' State Street building to enlarge their site on which to build the Golden Dome, generously donated to the school by the Edgar Newell Family in memory of Edgar A. Newell, II. The Newell Family also contributed funds toward the purchase of the United Helpers' State Street Home. Thus, the campaign was launched to demolish the Pythian Home, which was also an obsolete though a beautiful building, and start construction of the present United Helpers Nursing Home.

This was a unique undertaking both for the Society and the New York State Department of Health. It was the first combined health related and nursing home facility built in the state. The building had eighty health related and forty skilled nursing home beds.

In the meantime, the Society was asked to take over the Cedars and Moongate Nursing Homes under the State health department's receivership program. This meant that the Society ran these two facilities until a buyer could be found or the facilities were closed and the residents placed in other institutions out of the area. Ultimately, United Helpers decided it was in their best interest and within their charter and mission to purchase the two nursing homes.

The next project the Society undertook was the building of the Adult Home, the need having been established by the New York State Department of Social Services. An architect was hired, bids were published, a mortgage

procured, and the Adult Home was opened in June of 1979.

Though the Society was by this time focused on the care of the elderly, its reputation for addressing social concerns throughout the county was well known. In the mid 1970s, the St. Lawrence County Department of Social Services and the Children's Court Judge, John Shea, presented United Helpers with a problem. The children of St. Lawrence County who were in trouble with the law but not yet classed as delinquent were being sent to juvenile homes downstate. It was felt that if they were not criminals before they were sent away, they were sure to be when they returned. Judge Shea asked United Helpers to provide seed money to purchase two homes in St. Lawrence County to house these problem children. The first home for boys was located in Norwood. The second home for girls was in Potsdam. After the purchase of the homes, both were turned over to the Social Services Department to run. This plan enabled the County to save money, keep the children near their local areas, and send them to the public schools, while continuing to provide appropriate care. The Society continues to support the homes with a nominal contribution to each facility each year.

In 1981, the Society of United Helpers moved into a new area of care when it opened its first Intermediate Care Facility in Ogdensburg. During the 1970s national attention was directed at the poor conditions in many institutions for the mentally ill and developmentally disabled. New York was no exception. The closing of the Willowbrook Develop-

mental Center in Staten Island led to an effort to decentralize the care of the developmentally disabled with the goal of providing them a more normal home environment. Offering such care fit in well with the mission of the Society. By 1996, United Helpers was providing homes and services for people with developmental disabilities, brain injuries, and mental illness in small group homes in Ogdensburg, Lisbon, Heuvelton, Rensselaer Falls, and in Morristown, as well as in private homes throughout the county.

With changes in its activities and complexity of operations, it became apparent that the structure of the Society had to change. Separate boards were formed, new corporations established, and new bylaws written for each facility. All the members remained Society board members and had to be in order to serve on any one of the individual facility boards. The "new" corporations elected their own Boards of Directors and made their own budgets. Two representatives from each "Unit" Board became members of the Management Company Board. The Management Company Board oversees the general running of all the United Helpers unit facilities.

Over the years, United Helpers has become a major economic factor in St. Lawrence County. The organization currently has seventeen facilities, including its Management Company building, and employs over 700 people, making it one of the largest employers in the County.

Thus, the Society continues its charitable and chartered purposes. It oversees its endowment

and distributes the income to support new and diverse projects, encouraging and sustaining the unit facilities whenever necessary.

Despite its growth and the many changes which have taken place since its inception in 1898, the Society of United Helpers continues to base its activities on the original mission and values established 100 years ago — to care for those in need.

### **Sources consulted**

In addition to annual reports, scrapbooks with newspaper clippings, and other documents in the records of the Society of United Helpers, background information was found in *The History of Public Welfare in New York State* by David M. Schneider. (University of Chicago Press, 1938-1941).

### **About the authors**

Cheryl Madlin is the Secretary to the CEO of United Helpers. She has worked for the Society since 1969.

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### **Credits**

Illustrations were provided by United Helpers. Most were taken from the Society's annual reports. Portions of this article were previously published in the *Ogdensburg Journal* and the *Advance News*.



## **Leonora Barry**

**By Betsy Kepes and Emily Owen**

Everyone loves a mystery. Armed with an umbrella and a flashlight, an elderly Catholic priest leaves the Colton rectory on a rainy night to look for a long dead parishioner's gravestone. A high school girl searches through titles and deeds in the St. Lawrence County Courthouse. Another Catholic priest, this one from Minooka, Illinois, calls to say that church records there burned in a fire in 1906, but he has found the gravestone.

And who is the object of all this community research?

Born in County Cork, Ireland in 1849, Leonora Marie Kearney Barry Lake grew up in Pierrepont. Later as a General Investigator for the Knights of Labor, an early labor union, Mrs. Barry travelled around the United States for three and a half years "investigating, speaking, and organizing, on a scale that only two other women had equalled until then: Susan B. Anthony and Frances Willard. The wonder grows when one realizes that both the latter were well educated by the standards of their day and had served long apprenticeships in such activity. Mrs. Barry was catapulted from a stocking machine to national leadership, and the only schooling she had to draw upon was that of experience" (Flexner 197).

This is the story of trying to put together the details of the life of a woman from the North Country who overcame incred-

ible odds to become a national leader in human rights.

Leonora Marie Kearney grew up on a farm on the Irish Settlement Road in Pierrepont. Her parents, Honora and John Kearney, came to St. Lawrence County in 1852 when Leonora was three years old. The new life in America couldn't have been easy, but the thin soil between the tree stumps and rocks yielded potatoes, corn, and hay. Most farms in the mid-nineteenth century were almost self-sufficient, with a cow, a pig, and chickens; extra potatoes could be sold to the starch factory in Colton to provide a bit of cash.

St. Lawrence County contains several "Irish Settlement Roads" and that label reveals how the early Irish settlers in the county kept together in separate communities. The people in the eight or so Irish families where Leonora Kearney grew up were related as siblings, cousins, or by marriage. As Roman Catholics, the Irish did not join the local Protestant churches and may have been excluded from other community organizations. The settlers carried their Irish culture with them to St. Lawrence County and created their own world of church, music, and social customs.

By 1860, the Kearneys could report to the census taker the value of their farm as \$1200 and their personal estate as \$300, an average value for a family in Pierrepont.

Eleven year old Leonora and her seven year old brother, Henry, both attended school, probably at the Clohosey district school on the corner of the Sturtevant and Irish Settlement roads.

When Leonora was a young child, her parents may have driven the family to the Wildwood Road on the far side of Colton to attend Mass. A visiting priest from Potsdam came to the Hugh Casey home to perform Mass and baptisms. John Kearney, Leonora's father, was one of the original trustees of the First Roman Catholic Church of Colton when, in 1857, land was purchased in Colton for a cemetery. In 1864, the Universalist Society sold their building and it became St. Patrick's church, with 144 parishioners. Today the white, steeple-topped building belongs to the Gleason family and is the Northwood Gallery.

In the early 1860s, tragedy struck Leonora's family. Her mother, Honora, died, perhaps a victim of one of the many epidemics that swept through the North Country: measles, diphtheria, and cholera. Often these diseases killed children and adults in the late winter when families were weakened from an inadequate diet and months of cold and dark.<sup>1</sup>

In 1864 Leonora's father, John Kearney, aged forty-eight,

<sup>1</sup>Charlotte Knapp who lived on Waterman Hill in Pierrepont lost four children to a diphtheria epidemic between February and April 1863



*Gravestone of John Kearney and his second wife, Honor. St. Patrick's Cemetery, Colton, New York. Courtesy of J. Rebecca Thompson*

married nineteen year old Honor. In the same year, Leonora, now fifteen, decided to become a schoolteacher. She studied with a teacher in Colton, took her exams, and received her teaching certificate at age sixteen. For the next six years she taught in a district schoolhouse somewhere in St. Lawrence County.

At the end of the nineteenth century, it was common for young girls to be teachers. School boards were happy to employ them because their salaries were one half to one third of what a man would expect to earn in the same job. In the North Country, teachers often were "boarded out" at the homes of students. Always, salaries were low, rules for the teachers were strict, and

resources in the schoolhouse were few.<sup>2</sup> Still, it must have been a great freedom for Leonora to leave home and a stepmother only four years older than herself.

Married women could not continue to teach, so when Leonora married William Barry in Potsdam in 1871, she ended her teaching career. Most Americans at the time, including Leonora Barry, believed married women should not work outside the home. Young girls could work a few years before their marriage, but they didn't earn much money and usually the work was in unskilled employment. As Mrs. Barry would write years later, frustrated at the difficulty in organizing women workers, "A prevailing cause which applies to all

who are in the flush of womanhood, is the hope and expectancy that in the near future marriage will lift them out of the industrial life to the quiet and comfort of a home" (Andrews and Bliss 122).

William Barry, also an Irish immigrant, was a painter by trade. He supplemented the family income by giving lessons on the cornet. For a few years the Barrys lived a happy, settled family life. Their first child, Marion Frances, was born in Potsdam in 1871.

Beginning in 1873 and continuing until 1877, a severe recession swept through the United States. Thousands were unemployed or homeless. In search of work, William Barry took his young family to the mill towns of Massachusetts. A second child, William Standish, was born in Haydenville, Massachusetts in 1875.

When a third child, Charles Joseph, arrived in 1880, the family was living in Amsterdam, New York, then a boom town with many textile mills. Soon after the baby's birth, his father, William Barry, died of lung disease—either lead poisoning or tuberculosis. Four months later Leonora's oldest child, Marion, also died.

"I was left without knowledge of business, without knowledge of work, without knowledge of what the world was, with three fatherless children looking to me

<sup>2</sup>A. Barton Hepburn, who became school commissioner the year after Leonora Barry stopped teaching, remembered the "meager educational facilities of these villages." Books were scarce, and he later donated money for public libraries in many North Country towns.



*Women delegates to the 1866 Convention of the Knights of Labor. Leonora Barry is in the middle of the back row. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division (Neg.#LC-US262-12485).*

for bread. To support these children it became my duty to go out in the army of the employed and in one of the largest factories in central New York I went, and for four years and seven months remained a factory woman for the support of my little ones" (Barry).

On her first day at work in the hosiery mill, Mrs. Barry earned eleven cents; the first six-day week, sixty five cents. Why didn't she return to the North Country and take up teaching

again? Perhaps, as a widow with young children, she was considered "unsuitable" for a teaching job. Some women in the 1880s found work as office help, but "it was rare for an immigrant, the child of an immigrant, a black woman or a Jew to get a white collar position" (Wertheimer 233).

Work in the mills was difficult and dehumanizing. Days were long, often ten to twelve hours; talking at work was discouraged;

lunch breaks were very short and employees risked dismissal and the "black list" if they joined a union. Mrs. Barry "was particularly incensed by the insults to which she found young girls were obliged to submit in order to hold their jobs" (Andrews and Bliss 120).

When Mrs. Barry heard of the Knights of Labor, a union that encouraged women to join on an equal footing with men and was guided by the principle "to secure

for both sexes equal pay for equal work," she joined and quickly became a leader in her local assembly. As master workman for an assembly of nearly a thousand women, she was elected a delegate to the 1886 General Assembly in Richmond, Virginia. Of the 660 delegates, sixteen were women, more than any national convention before them. A photograph taken of the women shows them tightly corseted in dark, long sleeved dresses, their somber attire brightened by the presence of a newborn in a lacy, white dress. Mrs. Rodgers, mother of twelve and a delegate from Chicago, brought her two week-old baby to the convention. The women, staring intently at the camera, have placed their fingertips gently on the infant's head, perhaps to underscore their fierce desire to improve working conditions for the next generation of women and children.

These women delegates, and then the entire assembly, elected Mrs. Barry as General Investigator "to investigate the abuses to which our sex is subjected by unscrupulous employers, to agitate the principles which our order teaches of equal pay for equal work, and the abolition of child labor" (Andrews and Bliss 116).

For the next four years, Mrs. Barry travelled around the country investigating conditions at factories, organizing new local unions and delivering hundreds of speeches "as the eloquent voice of the working woman" (James 101). The North Country farm girl had become a national leader before the age of forty.

Completely dedicated to the Knights of Labor and working women, and "with a deep religious conviction that she was

God's instrument," Mrs. Barry often worked herself to the point of exhaustion (Kenneally 14). In her first year alone she travelled to more than thirty cities and spoke before the public over one hundred times.

Mrs. Barry's job as General Investigator was not a glamorous one. Travel was difficult and slow in the nineteenth century, and she was scorned by factory owners. When she discovered that women who had spoken to her during her tours of factories were fired from their jobs, she discontinued her direct tours and concentrated on organizing and educating women workers. Many conservative union men did not support her work with women, seeing organized women as a threat to their own jobs. Several Roman Catholic priests ranted in the press that the Knights of Labor was "a vulgar immoral society" for encouraging women to organize and denounced Mrs. Barry as a "lady tramp." The devout Mrs. Barry answered in an angry letter that as "an Irishwoman, a Catholic, and an honest woman," she had pledged to help her working sisters (Wertheimer 189).

But within the circle of those working for improving the lives of working people, Mrs. Barry received high praise. At the 1887 Knights of Labor convention, the Chief Officer stated, "I cannot speak too highly of the energy and ability displayed by the General Investigator. From the places she has investigated I hear the most flattering reports of her management" (Andrews and Bliss 117).

Frances Willard, a "society" woman who dedicated much of her life to social causes, spoke of Mrs. Barry as "that noble Irish woman" (Wertheimer 163). In

recognition of her excellent work, in 1888 Mrs. Barry was given an office at the Knights of Labor general headquarters in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania which she shared with her secretary, Mary O'Reilly. In addition, her salary was raised to \$4.00 a day for six days a week plus expenses, a handsome salary for the time.

"Tall, with a commanding presence, contagious smile, and flashing blue eyes under a broad brow, gifted with characteristically Irish humor, pathos and spontaneity (she never used a prepared speech)," Leonora Barry knew how to stir up an audience and was not afraid to speak her mind (James 101).

In 1888, at a gathering in Washington, D.C. at the Albaugh's Opera House honoring the fortieth anniversary of the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, Mrs. Barry shared the stage with many influential American women of the day, including Susan B. Anthony. When it was her turn to speak, Leonora Barry briefly described the history of the Knights of Labor and then spoke of her mission, "We are trying to teach the outside world that the working woman has feelings, has sensitiveness, has her heart's longings and desires for the better things in life, and any social or industrial system or environment that prevents woman from enjoying those gifts of a common Father must be broken, because it is utterly false" (Barry).

Next she spoke of her job in a large factory in central New York. She had been the "master workman" for a Knights of Labor assembly of 927 women, ranging from fourteen years of age to sixty. "And let me say to you here



*Leonora Barry Lake's gravestone, St. Mary's Church Cemetery, Minooka, Illinois. Courtesy of Betsy Kepes.*

that, although there was not one amongst them that could boast more than a minor part of a common school education, yet in that body of women there was more executive ability, more tact, more shrewdness, more keen calculating power than could be found in twice that number of men in the United States" (Barry).

Did a cheer rise from the audience of women who had been working to gain the vote for forty years, or was this rhetoric too radical even for them?

Leonora Barry ended her speech with a plea, recognizing that upper and middle class women must help the cause; "While you are mounting to your position at the top of the ladder, do not, I ask you, in the name of justice, in the name of humanity, do not forget to give your attention and some of your assistance to the root of all evil, the industrial and social system that is so oppressive, which has wrought the chain of circumstances in which so many have become entangled, and which has brought

the once tenderly-cherished and protected wife, the once fondly loved mother to the position of the twelve and fourteen hour toiler of today" (Barry).

After her Washington speech, Mrs. Barry packed her bag and travelled on to her next engagement, perhaps a meeting with union women in Syracuse or the workers in the cooperative knitting mill in Little Falls that she had helped organize. Or perhaps she managed to schedule a speech in Watertown, then took the train up to Potsdam to see her five year-old son, Charles, who lived with his aunts, Leonora's sisters-in-law. Her ten-year-old son William attended a convent boarding school in Philadelphia.

Leonora had no home of her own. She stayed with fellow Knights of Labor when she was travelling and when in Philadelphia on one of her brief interludes between lecture tours, she stayed with friends.

In her years as General Investigator, Leonora Barry worked

tremendously hard starting new local unions and strengthening existing ones, but she was often discouraged. All over the country women were poorly organized. "In Pittsburgh their condition is similar to that of all others who are unprotected—small pay for hard labor and long hours." In Providence, Rhode Island she found "inward dissension, neglect and indifference." And "if there is one cause more than another that fastens the chains on Baltimore working women it is their foolish pride, they deeming it a disgrace to have it known that they are engaged in honest toil. It will take a great deal of teaching and education to overcome this ..." (Andrews and Bliss 118).

Leonora believed in education and she believed in legislation. In her 1888 speech she told her audience, "If there is any one state for which I might make a special plea, it is that monopoly-bound state of Pennsylvania, with her 125,000 children under the age of fifteen employed in the workshops, factories, and mines." In 1889, the first Pennsylvania Factory Inspection Act passed, pushed along by the efforts of Mrs. Barry who worked behind the scenes, but refused to lobby the legislators directly, believing such actions to be unladylike.

Ironically, Leonora Barry ended her work with the Knights of Labor for the same reason that other women never even joined the union. In 1890 she married Obadiah Read Lake, a newspaper editor from St. Louis, and stopped her work as a paid organizer.

By 1890, the strength and membership of the Knights of

Labor was on the decline. Mrs. Barry knew this, but she may have been forced out of her leadership position. Her "commanding presence" threatened at least one male officer who complained that the executive committee had no control over Mrs. Barry (Weir 182).

As a married woman, Leonora felt it was important to do volunteer work, and she was active in Catholic charity organizations, in the women's suffrage movement, and in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. In 1893, at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Leonora spoke on "The Dignity of Labor" to the congress of women. Always a popular speaker, Mrs. Barry Lake lectured often on the Chatauqua circuit and for the Redpath and Slayton agencies. She continued to speak in public until age seventy-eight when she developed cancer of the mouth. Leonora lived the last forty years of her life in Illinois and died in Minooka, Illinois in 1930.

A woman of principle and a woman of action, Leonora Marie Kearney Barry Lake deserves a place in the history of St. Lawrence County.

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## About the authors

Betsy Kepes lives in her "homemade" house in Pierrepont with her husband, Tom Van de Water and sons, Lee and Jay. She teaches piano and performs with the Little River Trio. In the summer, she lives on a mountaintop in Idaho, working as a forest lookout.

Emily Owen lives in Pierrepont just down the road from where Leonora Barry grew up. She is an almost full-time artist and an occasional amateur historian and researcher.

# Memories of the Hotel Harrington

By Patricia Harrington Carson



*Hotel Harrington, Canton, New York (ca. 1925)*

Many times over the years I've dreamed that our beautiful old red brick hotel still stood in all its glory. Gracing the foot of Main Street on the banks of the Grasse River, it stood stately and welcoming to friends and guests alike.

In my dreams, I'm standing outside longing to enter again that wonderful place I once called home. But, alas, it is long since gone, as are most of the people who inhabited it. All that is left are the memories.

The hotel was built in 1864. It had many owners and various name changes by the time my father, Michael Harrington, purchased it in 1919 from Mrs. Thomas Burke. It was then known as The American House, though it was best known by its original name, Hodskin House.

World War I, "the war to end all wars," was over. And, although many still felt loss and devastation, the world seemed alive with the promise of peace and prosperity.

My father had for many years managed the Albion House in Potsdam, which was owned by a cousin, George Barnett. The Barnett family was closely connected with the Arlington Inn, as well, where my father also worked before he purchased the hotel in Canton.

My father grew up as a virtual orphan. His mother, Ellen Barnett Harrington, died in childbirth, leaving a baby girl who was cared for by relatives, and five boys who had to survive as best they could. Their father, seemingly, was unable to cope with his responsibilities.

But, survive they did, aided by the Barnett family. As a small boy, my father would get up in the dark to get the horses and carriages ready for the guests at the Albion. He then left for school, returning later to do more chores. He learned the hotel business early and knew what he wanted to do with his life. His later years as a hotelman were ones of happiness, fulfillment, and financial success.

My father was in his mid thirties when he met my mother, Mabel LaFay, who was many years younger. She was told he was a confirmed bachelor who would never settle down; however, they were married the following year in St. Mary's Church in Potsdam. It was a quiet affair as the LaFays were still in mourning for their son and brother Leon. He had enlisted in the army



*Michael Harrington*

two days after the United States entered the war and died in a hospital in England the day before the armistice was signed.

After my parents moved into the hotel, which was their first and only home together, they changed the name to the Hotel Harrington. They staffed it with the finest people Canton had to offer. Then the planned renovations began.

The dining room was restored to grand elegance with tiered crystal chandeliers extending the length of the room. Imported wallpaper covered the walls. Sconces along the sidewalls added to the charm of the room and illuminated the tables which were adorned with white, damask tablecloths and napkins at all times. Oriental rug runners covered the hardwood floors. The waitresses dressed in traditional black uniforms with white collars and cuffs and ruffled aprons.

There was a spacious, well-equipped kitchen with a dedicated staff who worked tirelessly seven days a week, not unusual in those days. Along the village side of the building, a porte-cochere was built to provide shelter for the guests alighting from their automobiles.

The lobby was huge with twenty foot ceilings graced by mahogany pillars and a black and white marble floor. On one wall was a brick fireplace. Brown leather sofas and chairs offered comfort to guests and travelers alike. A plate glass window extended across the front of the building, offering a wonderful view of Main Street. Adjoining the lobby was another large room, mirrored on the far side and windowed on the front. It was always painted some shade of blue and thus was known as the "Blue Room." This room also had a brick fireplace. On either side were French doors, which opened onto a newly built veranda.

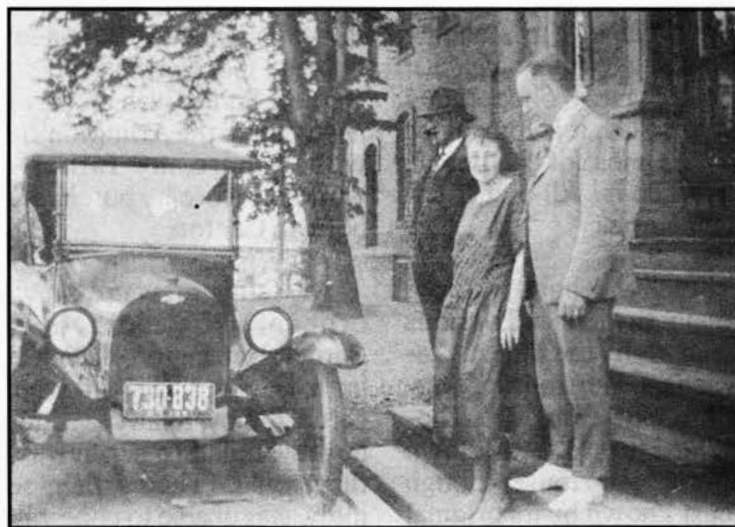
The veranda extended the full length of the hotel with large windows of paned glass. There were striped awnings to be used in summer for shade. It offered a

view of the side lawn and many graceful weeping willow trees. French lilac bushes of purple and white lined the lawn in back of the hotel and there was a barn that had once been used for horses and carriages.

At one point, there was a laundry in the basement run by a Chinese family who had rooms on the third floor, along with other members of the staff. Kind and gentle people, they were liked by all. It was common practice in those days to offer room and board to one's employees. The help's meals were served in the back kitchen before the dining room opened. After prohibition was repealed, a bar was opened in the basement where the laundry had previously been.

My parents' suite was at the head of the staircase on the second floor. It had a large living room with French doors that led to an outdoor area over the porte-cochere. My parents' bedroom adjoined.

In March 1921, the Harringtons had their first child, a son. They named him Leon LaFay after Mabel's brother who had so



*Michael and Mabel Harrington with a hotel guest (1921)*





*Mabel Harrington with daughter Jean, and sister Doris, a nurse (ca. 1922)*

recently died. Sadly, the baby lived for only a half hour. Hoping to somehow fill the emptiness they both felt, Michael Harrington called the Fresh Air Committee in New York City and asked if he and his wife could have the youngest boy who would be coming to the North Country for the summer.

When the Harringtons arrived at the train station at the appointed time, they found a four year old child sitting on a straw suitcase waiting for them. His name was Billy Walsh. Billy delighted everyone at the hotel—guests and staff alike. He was a handsome boy with the singing voice of an angel. He came to stay with the Harringtons for many summers and was loved by Michael and Mabel Harrington until the day they died.

The Harringtons had three more children of whom I was the youngest. My sister Jean was six and my brother Jack was four when I was born. We were all delivered by Dr. Laidlaw in my parents' upstairs bedroom. I wasn't born in a hurry. My

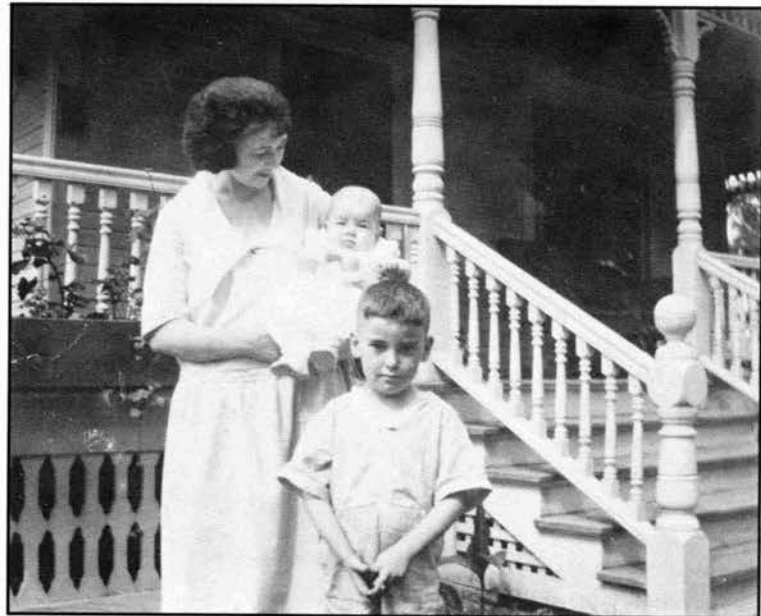
mother was in labor a full day before I made my appearance. It was the day before St. Patrick's Day and my mother said she could hear Irish songs being sung by the help as they went about their work. She heard "Oh Paddy Dear and did you hear the news that's going round" more than a few times, and thus her decision was made. I was called Patty and not Mary Lou as was the original plan.

The sleeping quarters for we children looked out over Main Street. We loved peering out the windows at all the goings-on. Kaplan's Department Store was directly across the street. It's windows were always filled with marvelous clothes for all ages.

Once I talked Dorothy, my nurse-girl, into taking me over on a Saturday evening while my parents were entertaining. I bought three dresses and charged them to my father. They and their guests were a little surprised when I joined their party modeling one

of them, while a nervous Dorothy stood in the background. It was ten o'clock at night. I curtsied and asked, "Do you like my new dress? I have two more upstairs!"

There were lots of parties throughout the year. In the winter months, they were held in the lobby and the adjoining dining room. How vividly I remember peeking over the large banister at the happy crowds of people milling around. For one New Year's Eve party, I was allowed to watch from my highchair, which was placed in the dining room. The room was quite dark and mostly what I remember is hearing the music and watching the dancers' feet. It seemed all the ladies were wearing gold or silver slippers. I was intrigued and enjoying it all until I saw my father dancing with someone I didn't know. My screams filled the air and there was no quieting me. I, and my highchair, were quickly removed. It wasn't until the next day that my parents found out the cause of my outburst. If my father ever



*Billy Walsh with Mabel Harrington and baby Jean (summer 1922).*



*The author on the roof of the hotel's porte cochere overlooking Main St.*

again danced with anyone other than my mother, he certainly didn't when I was around.

Every few years, the hotel held a masquerade party, or "fancy dress ball." The revelers would get in the spirit with their imaginative costumes. I loved watching my parents and my grandmother get ready. One year, my mother wore an old-fashioned dress which she had purchased at a local auction. It was burgundy and cream plaid with ruffles of burgundy. It had stays in the top and a full skirt with a bustle effect. I remember how pretty she looked and I still have the dress. My grandmother, on the other hand, wore my father's tweed knickers and sweater and carried a golf bag.

In summer, the parties were held on the newly built veranda. The adjoining side yard was decorated with Japanese lanterns that

glowed in the dark night and reflected in the water, as music from a dance band filled the air.

Charlie, one of the desk clerks, was from New York City and had once been in vaudeville. I was told that often during the quiet times, the lobby became a dance floor as he taught my sister the tap dancing routines that he had once done on the stage. For my sister's eighth birthday, he gave her a small diamond ring set in platinum that is still in our family today.

At the same time, my brother, who was a born dancer, was being taught how to do the Charleston, the dance craze of the day. When the dining room was closed, Chet, one of the young

waitresses, would push back the tables and with a Victrola playing, teach him the steps that are so identified with that time—the 'Roaring Twenties'.

My mother decided that tap dancing lessons would be a good idea for Jean and Jack so she hired two local sisters to come to the hotel to teach them. I was considered too young to participate, but I watched and tried to do the steps after they left. So, I ended up with lessons, also. The following year, I danced in a pink dress to "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" at the Opera House. It was my first time on stage.

Our family table in the dining room was close to the swinging doors that led in and out of the



*The author in the hotel lobby*



*The author's brother, Jack, with Mrs. Phalen, one of the hotel staff whom he greeted every morning when she came to work (ca. 1925)*

kitchen. This spot was chosen so my father could keep his eye on the comings and goings of the tray-laden waitresses. One night things were not going as they should. After a time, my father left the table to see what the problem was. Once in the kitchen, he found all in disarray. Some of the staff were on their knees; some were crying; some were saying, "The end of the world is coming." All were clustered around the one window that looked toward Bullis Hill (now the Stillman Drive area). On the hill, a cross was burning. Canton knew little of the Ku Klux Klan and their activities. My father, realizing what it was, tried to reassure them. He may have implied, though, that the end of the world might be coming if the customers did not get their dinners soon.

I remember my mother helping us make crepe paper baskets with braided handles, lined with wax paper, and filled with spring flowers which were delivered to our friends on May Day. We

hung them on their doorknobs, rang the bell, and disappeared, leaving them to guess who had been there. This was a popular custom in those long-ago days.

My father, having had to do without as a child, saw to it that

we children never did without. He bought each of us a Shetland pony and at one point went to Saratoga to buy a racehorse. While there, he saw a circus going out of business, so he bought the tent and had it shipped to Canton. For many summers, it filled the side yard where we, and every other child in town that could be rounded up, put on a circus.

Dennis Woods, my uncle, was a local contractor. He built bleachers for the spectators to sit on in the tent. He also made three wooden rings so we could have a true three-ring circus. Our ponies pranced around the outer ring with colored ribbons cascading from their necks. Pony rides were offered with the ponies being led by my sister. There was a trapeze rigged up in the center ring on which several children performed their tricks. It seems everybody wanted to be a trapeze artist and they spent a lot of hours



*Circus performers*



*The Harrington children and Brownie in the Hotel driveway*

practicing. There was also a magician in a black top hat and cape, plus a fortune teller with large gold hoop earrings.

There were lots of clowns. All one needed to be a clown was to have a costume, so clowns came in every size and shape. My brother was the barker, standing out front calling for everyone to come in. My mother made him a red and white striped blazer which he wore with one of my father's straw hats.

My grandmother had a recipe for homemade root beer which she, my mother, and some of the kitchen help made and bottled. One year, this was brought out and served to the circus customers.

Aunt Marthe, my grandmother's sister, came one year for the circus. Aunt Marthe never

had children so she joined her sister in grandmothering us. For her contribution, she made clowns from gumdrops of every size and color. She fashioned them with great care, putting them together with toothpicks. They disappeared in a hurry when they were passed around.

Japanese lanterns were used in the tent for the evening performance, which went on long past most of our bedtimes. There was never a shortage of customers, with all of our families and the hotel guests to draw from.

Those days were filled with so much fun and joy, the memories are unforgettable. I can still see, in my mind's eye, all of us in our hand-made costumes and I can hear my brother calling out, "Come one, come all, to the greatest show on earth." And to us, it was.

In winter, we had a cutter that was pulled by one of our ponies. Cuddled under a bear-skin throw, with sleigh bells ringing, we would plow through the snow-covered streets. In summer, the cutter was replaced with a wicker cart—so our ponies had lots of exercise year-round.

Out back there was a playhouse that was fully furnished. There was also a rabbit hutch where white bunny rabbits were raised. Having grown up wearing a white fur coat or two, I always suspected that this was where the fur came from. However, my mother assured me that my coats came from Frank's Department Store in Ogdensburg and not from our bunnies.

The Christmas holidays were festive and much anticipated. Santa Claus always came on Christmas Eve. After dinner, Jean

and Jack gave gifts out to the staff as I watched from my mother's arms. The gifts were always the same—gold pieces in white leather holders. I imagine the amount of the coin depended on how long a person had been employed. While this was going on in the lobby, Santa would be going about his work upstairs in our apartment.

A large tree stood in all its glory near the fireplace in the lobby. Here, wassail was served before Christmas dinner. The man who supplied trees said ours was always the largest in town, which stood to reason considering the height of the hotel ceilings. The dining room for Christmas dinners, as well as Thanksgiving and other holidays, was filled with townspeople. Guests were dressed in their best, as was

the custom in those days. A man could not eat in the dining room without wearing a tie.

One of our favorite holidays was Independence Day. In the morning, a parade would form on the bridge and with bands playing and flags waving would march up Main Street past the Hotel and the Town Hall to the village park where a ceremony was held. In the evening, fireworks were set off on the side yard, arching over the river as we all watched in awe. It was always a long and wonderful day.

The good times seemed like they would never end, but they did, on that dark Monday in October of 1929 when the stock market crashed. My father, like others of the era, had invested in the stock market, and the crash

was a bitter blow. Much of the joy was gone from his life. He had worked so hard for so long. It was a time of broken dreams and lost fortunes for many.

Our lives were not changed dramatically. The hotel was still ours, and we felt safe and secure and never had to do without. We were a lot luckier than many others, though my father's health declined in the following years. He died in August 1934 at the age of fifty-one.

This was the end of the frivolous times that had so marked the past years. Sadly, the 'Flappers' and the 'Charleston', without warning, now belonged to a time gone by.

The light in many lives was extinguished forever. It was gone



*4th of July parade float.*

as completely as the light from the Japanese lanterns. I remember them glowing so brightly on the hotel's side yard while the music played and the world basked in innocence and joy.

### Credits

All pictures, except as noted, courtesy of Patricia Harrington Carson.

### About the author

Patricia Harrington Carson still lives in Canton with her husband, Barry Andrew. The Carsons have two children and five grandchildren. They are long time supporters of the Historical Association; Pat has served on the Board of Trustees for many years.



*The Hotel Harrington in the 1940s.*

*The Harrington family apartment was in the corner of the second floor with their living room opening onto the roof of the porte cochere entrance on the side of the hotel.*

*Courtesy of Walter Leonard, Dompnier-Leonard Insurance and Patricia H. Carson.*

# From the Bookshelf

by David Trithart

## *Reflections from Canoe Country: Paddling the Waters of the Adirondacks and Canada*

By Christopher Angus  
Illustrated by Anna Gerhard Arnold  
Syracuse University Press, 1997

Flowing water, from tiny creeks near his home in the North Country to the ocean off Newfoundland, is the theme of this collection of short incisive pieces by Canton native Christopher Angus. His main focus is on the relationship between us and our watery natural environment, but he makes delightful asides into topics as varied as wind, moose, birch trees, and hatchets.

The sixty-plus pieces are all short and quite personal. Reading them, you will feel you have come to know the author as a gentle and thoughtful person.

Lurking always near the edge of his thinking is politics, or more accurately, the forces of society and economy as they confront the landscape. You begin to sense very quickly that Chris Angus is nowhere happier than when he is far from the built environment. How to protect and preserve the embattled remains of nature's majesty in the Northeast is his abiding concern. The author has lived his entire life in the North Country, but his roots here go generations deeper. He is able to reach back to see the impact of gradual change. His love for this country is shadowed by a fear that it could lose the characteristics which make it unique and inspire

our love. His hope is that wider awareness of our natural heritage will bring forth the will to preserve it.

Fortunately, much remains to be an inspiration for anyone who makes the effort to see, hear, smell, and live it. This book brings to life numerous examples of what can still be found. It reminds us all how easy it can be to open our eyes to nature's wonders and of how important it is to guard the qualities that are the essence of the Adirondacks. The author clearly loves the North Country, and especially the Adirondacks. While his affection embraces all the wild aspects of the park, nearest his heart are the lakes and streams which make it, "quite simply one of the best spots in the world for canoeing." From a canoe one can get to know much of the area, and Chris has paddled both well-known and obscure waters. These essays illuminate many of the pleasures that await the canoeist—the colors, the wildlife, and, of course, the landscape itself. These unique qualities have engendered pressures on the park from the growing urban areas which surround it. Among the essays are those which remind us of some of the losses already incurred, such as shoreline development and closed

canoe routes. Chris has been active in the struggle to protect the park from the forces which would radically change its character. The recovery of public access to traditional canoe routes is one of his main objectives.

Readers will finish the book with both a sense of what we have, and a realization that the efforts of many will be needed to keep it. The illustrations by Anna Gerhard Arnold combine with the text to produce a fine portrait of this region and of our times. The book effectively calls our attention to the small and large treasures of "canoe country." Chris's generosity of spirit and concern for our environment are fully in evidence in this set of delightful writings.

## Cracker Box

Compiled by Trent Trulock

### Norwood Historian, Susan Lyman, Honored by State

by Persis Boyesen, Historian for the City of Ogdensburg, Town of Oswegatchie, and Village of Heuvelton.

Susan C. Lyman, Town of Potsdam and Village of Norwood Historian was honored with the Association of Municipal Historians of New York State Award at their annual meeting September 17th, 1998 at Batavia, New York.

Mrs. Lyman was unable to attend the state meeting. Persis Boyesen, Recognitions Chair of the Association of Municipal Historians of New York State, presented the award to Mrs. Lyman at the fall meeting of the St. Lawrence County Historians Group held October 2nd, 1998 at the St. Lawrence Inn, Canton.

To be considered an outstanding historian, four criteria are considered in selecting a nominee. The historian has:

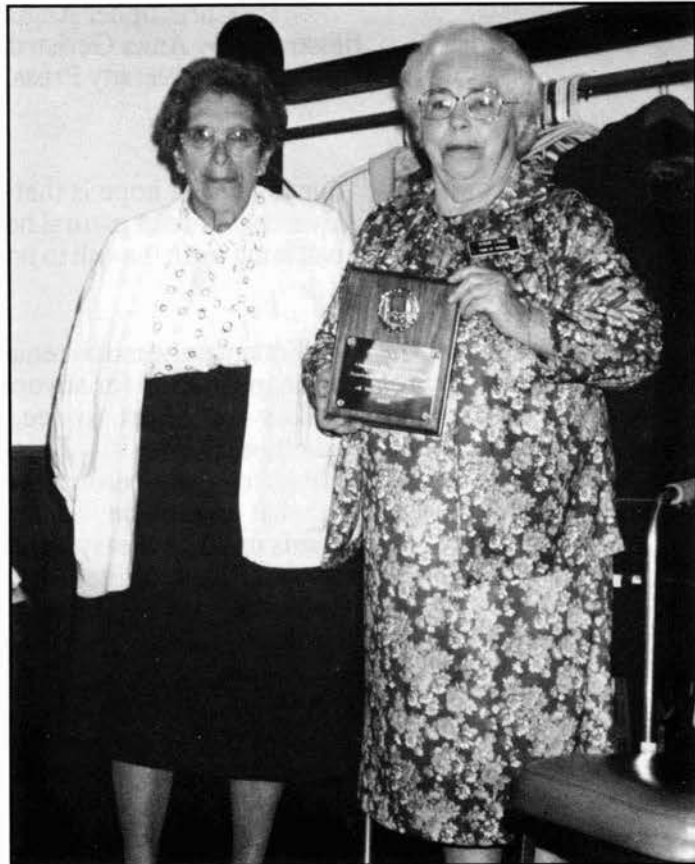
- measured up to the task of being a municipal historian;
- produced written or visual historical material such as a film or photo essay;
- made public presentations;
- made a meaningful contribution to the historical community.

Susan C. Lyman was appointed Town of Potsdam Historian in 1962 and Village of Norwood Historian in 1965. She has published *History of*

*Norwood, NY* (1971); *Rails Into Racquetteville* (1976); and *Story of Norwood* (1995). Lyman has also had several articles published in *The Quarterly*. She has written on many topics such as: Potsdam sandstone, the history of Potsdam, local industry, early schools, fire and police history. She has completed eight pamphlets on the history of the

Norwood Methodist Church and many articles for the Norwood page in the *Potsdam Courier-Freeman*.

Mrs. Lyman did the primary research for Dr. Henry Vinicor's 1986 book, *The History of Medicine in St. Lawrence County, New York, Since 1807*. She has done an illustrated story on the 1940



*Persis Boyesen (L), City of Ogdensburg Historian, presents Susan Lyman (R), Town of Potsdam, Village of Norwood Historian, with a plaque from the Association of Municipal Historians of New York State. Photograph by SLCHA.*





*Town of Hammond Museum on opening day, October 17, 1998. Built with mostly volunteer labor, it took a year to complete it.  
Courtesy of Lowell E. Kelsey.*

Army maneuvers in the Norwood area which were inspected by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. She researched and wrote about Norwood's Civil War nurse, Ellon Looby.

She speaks often to fourth and seventh graders in Norwood Schools, shows artifacts, and acts as a resource person for teachers and students. She established the Lyman Memorial Award for Social Studies. She speaks to Girl and Boy Scouts and is a local history resource person for secondary and college students. Available in her office for public use is an ongoing file and scrapbook on people, politics, local and national news.

Lyman was assistant chair for the three-day 1972 Norwood Centennial and did all the publicity for newspapers, radio, and

television. She has taped interviews with three senior citizens regarding the 1889 Barnum and Bailey circus train wreck, and she wrote an illustrated story for the newspaper on the train wreck, which was reprinted in the circus magazine, *White Tops*.

She has been presented with the Norwood Historical Association Certificate of Merit in 1972 and 1980; the Region I Bessie Waldorf Award in 1986; the Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year in 1981; the New York State Press Association top award in 1968; and has received an engraved plaque from the Town of Potsdam in 1992 and an engraved clock from the Village of Norwood in 1994.

Susan Lyman co-founded the Norwood Historical Association in 1962 and the Norwood Mu-

seum in 1969, where she served as co-chair for nineteen years. She also co-founded the St. Lawrence County Historians Group in 1991 and served as co-chair through 1998, organizing semi-annual continuing education and social meetings.

### **Town of Hammond Museum Opens**

The new Town of Hammond Museum had its grand opening on Saturday, October 17, 1998. Several hundred people attended the opening, and the ribbon cutting was performed by Valera Bickelhaupt, Historian for both the Town and Village of Hammond. The museum is operated by the R. T. Elethorp Historical Society. Prior to the completion of the new building, its collection was housed in the basement of the Town Hall.

## Town of Stockholm Honors Historian

At the Stockholm Historical Organization's Summer Exhibit Opening, the Town of Stockholm Historian Mildred F. Jenkins was honored with a plaque for twenty-five years of service. The plaque was presented by St. Lawrence County Historian Trent Trulock on behalf of the residents of the Town of Stockholm.

Mildred F. Jenkins, who took over as historian in July of 1973 and was officially appointed historian in 1974, has written countless newspaper articles, and has insured that the Stockholm Historical Organization, which was formed in 1979, has received wonderful press coverage.

Mildred not only writes articles and makes photographic records, she also works on getting donations of historical artifacts to the

Stockholm Historical Organization, so that these artifacts, such as the iron work that dates from one of Stockholm's dismantled bridges, will survive to enlighten future generations. Mildred works tirelessly for the cause of history.

## Norwood Museum News

by Susan Lyman, Village of Norwood, Town of Potsdam Historian

Richard Boyle of Norwood has been named chairman of the Norwood Historical Association and Museum, effective immediately. He succeeds George Veraldo who is retiring for reasons of health.

Mr. Boyle, a native of Fort Covington, retired four years ago after a thirty-four year career as a mathematics teacher at Port Washington, Long Island. He is president of the Norwood

Kiwanis Club, plays trumpet in the famous Norwood Brass Firemen Band, and is a member of the St. Mary's School Advisory Board.

One of Richard's goals as head of the busy museum is to encourage people of all ages to take advantage of visiting and viewing the great range of historical artifacts, pictures, and books there. Plans for using museum resources to enhance social studies curriculum in local schools are being formulated. Some of the material collected by the Norwood Museum includes: the impact of the railroad, the Firemen's Brass Band, the stores, restaurants, mills, early land history, the school system, banks, churches, library, and fire department.



*St. Lawrence County Historian Trent Trulock presents Town of Stockholm Historian Mildred Jenkins with a plaque honoring her 25 years of service to the Town.  
Photograph by SLCHA.*

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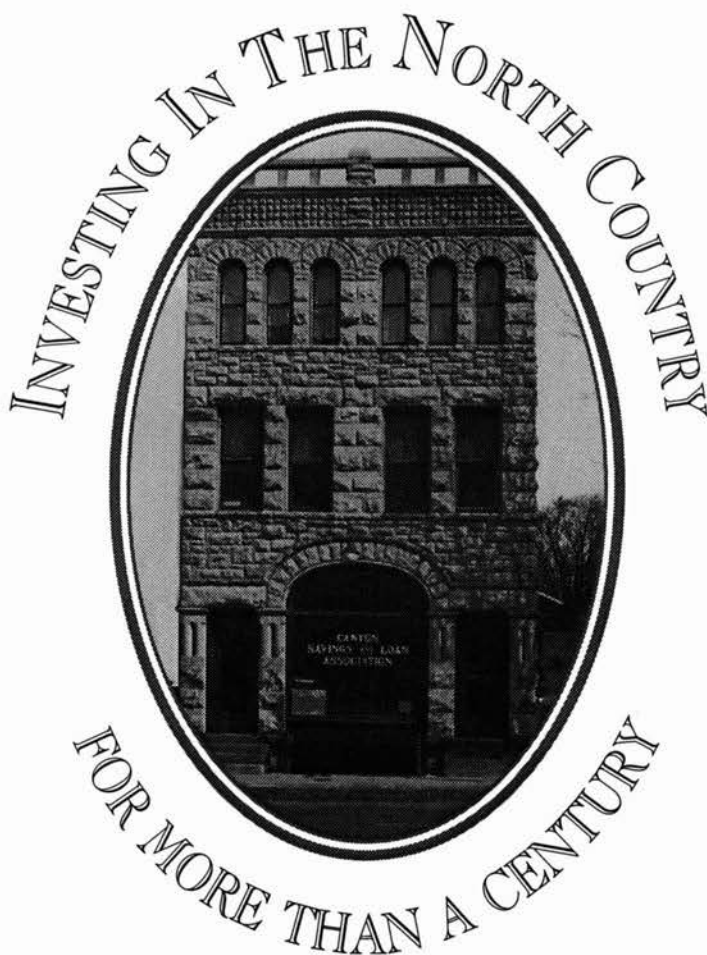
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