Contents

2 ......................... No Sunshine Patriots:  
Three Stories of Revolution on the West Branch

11. ....................... Who Was John R.T. Ryan?

16. ....................... Etta Alice Neff:  
World War I Nurse

18. ....................... The Woman’s Club  
of Williamsport, Pennsylvania, 1925 – 1950

32. ....................... The Brownlee Sisters

38. ....................... Dr. Kenneth R. Raessler and Williamsport’s  
School Music Program:  
The Importance of Proficient Leadership

Photos from Cover:

Top Row:  
Anonymous Grouping of Men (Musicians)  
Tintype, no photographer noted  
P13.6019

Anonymous Child  
Cabinet card, Rosse & Company- photographer, 124 W. 4th St., Williamsport  
Donated by Charles Yoder  
P5.1509

Unidentified Couple (World War I Soldier & Woman)  
Snapshot, no photographer noted  
2004.147.9 [see also .147.6 & .147.7]  
P7.2547

Middle Row:  
Anonymous Grouping of Men in front of the Montour House [Montoursville, PA.]  
Mounted on cardboard, no photographer noted  
P13.6013

Anonymous Family (of Oriental descent)  
Mounted on cardboard, Eugene Stuart- photographer, Williamsport  
P8-3003

Anonymous Couple  
Mounted on cardboard, Dean- photographer, Williamsport  
P7.2517

Bottom Row:  
Anonymous Couple (at a Picnic)(1926)  
Snapshot, no photographer noted  
P7.2527

Anonymous Group (School Group)  
Mounted on cardboard, H.C. Weasner, photographer,  
342 Pine St., Williamsport  
Identifications on reverse: “Teacher Miss Smith 1. Raymond Forest  
43. Iland Rook 44. George Wilkins 44. Fred 45. Willie Steel  
46. Nelson Desau  
Most everyone is named, but the school is not identified!  
P11.4016

Anonymous Grouping of People of Ralston, PA?  
Cabinet Card, Schindler- photographer, Ralston  
A76.10.2  
P11.4039

The views and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the Lycoming County Historical Society.
Everyone has a story to tell. On the front cover are a few photographs from the archives of the Lycoming County Historical Society. Unfortunately, as with many photographs, they are unidentified.

I find photographs such as these particularly poignant- they were someone's child or mother or father. I enjoy studying photographs – what clues can be derived from a close examination of the photograph? Period of time when taken? Occupation? Hobbies? Certainly, they can be studied for clothing and hair styles, recreations of the day, and what was important to the sitter. They can also be studied as the corpus of work of a photographer. Look at them closely—perhaps they are your relative and you can identify them for us. [Note: Identify your treasured family photographs now – while you remember who and where and what!]

And, note that all these were taken in Lycoming County, Pennsylvania. What an incredibly rich history the county has! That richness is intimately tied to the men and women whose lives are interwoven into the history of the county. And the people pictured on the cover may have played an important role in the development of the county. Or a lesser role—still a part of history! Even though we could revisit the lives of Michael Ross or Peter Herdic, we have chosen to share some lesser known stories of Lycoming Countians.

The submission of articles this year brought a natural theme of ‘the men and women of Lycoming County’. Maggie Slawson and Christopher Pearl have explored the events leading up to the Revolutionary War, placing into context the actions of three local men who served as soldiers during that time period. Robert Covenhoven, Richard Martin and Robert King are the men in question. Matt DiRocco’s fascinating article concerns John R.T. Ryan who has been largely forgotten by the present generation. During his lifetime, Ryan was immensely influential in the acquisition and development of the county’s modern conveniences, including electricity and the electric railway. As Matt continues to refurbish the former John R.T. Ryan home on East Third Street, he is also uncovering the many layers of Ryan’s life. John Piper takes us on a journey to uncover the rich history of an enduring organization – the Woman’s Club. He follows the history of the organization from its founding in 1924-1925 through its first twenty-five years.

John Hunsinger’s delightful study recalls the musical career of the Brownlee Sisters, four sisters who achieved national success, performing on the same stage as Tommy Dorsey, Danny Kaye, Arthur Godfrey and Kate Smith. I pay tribute to Etta Neff Gooding, who risked ‘life and limb’ to serve as a nurse at Base Hospital #19, American Expeditionary Forces in Vichy, France, during World War I. Oscar Knade provides us with a tribute to the late Ken Raessler, who was extremely influential in the growth of the Williamsport Area School District’s nationally-recognized music program.

I hope you will enjoy this issue of the Journal. If you haven’t been in to see the museum lately, please do come! If you aren’t a member, please consider joining. We will be honored to have you among us!

Gary W. Parks
Editor
On September 29, 1832, Benjamin Walker, in the autumnal years of his life, reminisced about his experience as a young man and a revolutionary soldier. In 1769, when only 11, Benjamin moved to the West Branch Valley with his family. At first, they lived in a small home in Turbutt Township, but within a few years they staked their claim to some rich alluvial land in the disputed territory between Lycoming and Pine Creeks. It was there that the Walker family helped establish a close knit self-governed community, and it was that frontier community that would forever shape Benjamin’s life and his revolutionary experience. Along with his neighbors and family members, Benjamin eagerly volunteered at the outbreak of war, but he did not fight in those now famous battles immortalized by history. He did not cross the Delaware River with General Washington, he did not give the British “a devil of a whipping” at Cowpens, and he did not see the surrender at Yorktown. Instead, he “always rendered” his services “upon the frontier.” The “cause of his services,” Walker recalled, “was his knowledge of the Indian mode of Warfare, his correct use of a rifle, and his father living there and suffering the loss not only of property but also of life by savage barbarity.”

Benjamin was like many other men, young and old, living near the valley. They too committed themselves to the war, and, like Benjamin, stayed close to home. They joined the struggle to protect their neighbors, their friends, and their kin from the ever present reality of raids by Britain’s Native American allies. During those “times that try men’s souls,” they would not nor could not be those soldiers that Thomas Paine desirously labeled summer soldiers and sunshine patriots; the safety of their homes dictated otherwise.2 Richard Mattocks, for instance, who lived close to the Walker family, mustered after the outbreak of war in 1775. Although he “suffered greatly,” catching a debilitating camp fever that laid him up for over six months, he continued to volunteer. After he recovered, he mobilized for war no less than five times and, even when not on duty, participated in a “number of short tours” in and around the West Branch.3 According to the commander of Fort Augusta, Colonel Samuel Hunter, men like Mattocks and Walker had to fight so often “for their own preservation.” Yet, that mentality also made many men refuse to serve beyond the boundaries of their local communities. When General Washington requested relief at Valley Forge, for example, Colonel Hunter simply related that “the Generality of the Inhabitants does not think it prudent to let any out of the County” while “the Frontiers is like to suffer by a cruel savage enemy.”

Their unwillingness to leave their homes did not make them any less revolutionaries. The war for American Independence meant just that. It offered them a stake in a new government free from imperial constraints on both land and politics. Such a struggle accorded with their own colonial history and experience. The population in Pennsylvania was doubling every twenty years, cutting off access to good land at affordable prices. To make matters worse, speculators, ever ready to capitalize on the increasing demand for land, received preferment from the proprietary family, the Penns. In fact, Thomas Penn, while placing a moratorium on land settlement between Lycoming and Pine Creeks, granted all land east of it to a few prominent speculators who quickly raised prices. The Walkers, for instance, originally bought one of those small parcels from speculator, Colonel Turbutt Francis. Not only would potential settlers need to buy land from these speculators at inflated prices, but they would have to continue to pay a feudal duty on that land, quitrents, to the proprietors. In essence, under the colonial system they paid dearly for land they would never totally own.

1. Benjamin Walker, Revolutionary War Pension Files, W.14088.
The territory between Lycoming and Pine Creeks offered an opportunity to escape that woefully corrupted and broken political system. Symbolic of this view, Benjamin Walker’s father quitted Turbut Township and squatted on land near Pine Creek and dubbed it “Good Hope.” Their claim to that land, tenuous as it was, was consistently threatened by imperial and colonial officials who wanted to unseat the squatters. Further compounding their problems, the local Native Americans despised this intrusion on their hunting land, imburing the valley in blood. American independence, many hoped, would counteract all of these threats by legitimizing their claims to the land with new policy.

They had good reason to expect the new state government would recognize their ownership of the land. That government’s constitution, which some of the valley inhabitants such as Robert Martin helped create, was birthed in revolution and predicated on a radical participatory democracy that in many ways mirrored the valley inhabitants’ history and devotion to popular sovereignty. Living beyond the boundary of lawful settlement in the colonial period, the people of the valley set up their own government reflecting the will of the people. Their “Fair Play” system, a three man tribunal with an annual rotation of officers, managed all disagreements in the disputed territory. The people’s acceptance of the tribunal was as swift as its judgments. According to the state mandated Laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, “From their decision there was no appeal. There could be no resistance. The decree was enforced by the whole body, who started up in mass, at the mandate of the court, and execution and conviction” was “sudden and irresistible.” Reinforcing the popular sovereignty of the community, anyone who disagreed with the system or refused to recognize its authority was placed in a canoe and cast off from the community. When the valley became part of the commonwealth in 1784, the state government, with little debate, enshrined the rulings of the tribunal in positive law. That acceptance reflected the congenial nature of the two systems and helps us understand why the majority of valley inhabitants supported the revolution and the state.

So deep were the grievances in the valley and so popular the revolution that we still assume the veracity of a popular myth that the “Fair Play Men” declared their independence in Britain on the same day as the Continental Congress in Philadelphia.

Achieving that independence, though, had less to do with expelling the British Army than it did with securing possession of the West Branch. While their relations with local native peoples had been strained before the war, it worsened after. The Native Americans served as a critical component of the British offensive. Incapable of fielding an army large enough to suppress a colonial wide resistance movement, a fact that British commanders on the ground rued but that officials across the Atlantic could do nothing about, the empire attempted a three pronged approach. The main thrust of the war would occur in the northeast where the British troops would cut radical Boston from the rest of the colonies. To supplement their numbers and provide internal combustions, imperial officials such as Lord North and George Grenville looked to recruit those colonists still loyal to the crown, who they mistakenly thought were more numerous than those in actual rebellion. Out west, where those “damned, hot-headed Presbyterians who were aiming at Independence” lived, the British relied on their alliance with the Six Nations who they promised a successful end to the war would result in their repossession of ancestral lands. With Forts Mackinac, Niagara and Detroit serving as outposts of support, the Six Nations, particularly the Seneca, laid waste to the Pennsylvania frontier. The West Branch Valley felt the brunt of that strategy.

The sheer destruction of the war years, including such horrible events as the Wyoming Massacre and the Big and Little Runaways, defined the Revolutionary War in the valley. Settlers’ families were scattered, missing or dead, their homes were laid waste, their farms decimated, and their crops and cattle destroyed. It was a hard felt reality and existence. While the surrender at Yorktown ended the war in the east, the revolution in the valley was far from over. Not only would peace have to be established with the Senecas, but the people would have to rebuild their lives. In many cases both proved far easier to contemplate than to actually carry out. Despite these hardships, or maybe even because of them, many of the men who fought in the revolution remained active in their community. They served as grand jurors, assembly members, justices of the peace, and many more continued to partake in the politics of the streets. Such general statements, however, hardly encapsulate that experience. To understand the totality of the revolution in the valley one must look to the stories of individuals and families who endured it. What follows are three biographies of revolutionary soldiers from the valley. Each show the depth of commitment to the war, to local independence, and to the communities in which they lived.

Robert King

Robert King was a Scotch-Irish born in Derry County, Ireland, August 2, 1753. However, at the start of the eighteenth century, the harsh economic conditions in Ireland pushed a series of migrations to Pennsylvania. The majority of these Scotch-Irish migrants sought land west of the

9. Peter Wilson Coldham, American Migrations 1765-1799:
Susquehanna as the eastern lands were far too expensive.\textsuperscript{11} They also wanted to evade the proprietors and their land officers, both of whom they deemed just as unscrupulous as the landlords they left back in Ireland. Yet, to do this, many had to occupy land on Indian owned territory, sparking animosity between the settlers and the natives. Robert and his three brothers experienced these land disputes first hand, in Pine Creek, Lycoming County, Pennsylvania in 1773.

The first Stanwix Treaty, proposed in 1768, extended the legitimate line of colonial settlement previously made by the Proclamation of 1763.\textsuperscript{12} The Indians agreed to sell Thomas and William Penn, proprietors of the colony, territory along the Susquehanna. Not only did this “New Purchase”\textsuperscript{13} grant land to veterans of the French and Indian War, but also became a spot of interest to the Scotch immigrants.

The boundary of the treaty extended from the West Branch of the Susquehanna to the Tiadaghton Creek.\textsuperscript{14} The Indians however, interpreted Tiadaghton Creek as Lycoming Creek and white settlers believed it to be Pine Creek making the land in between the two creeks “disputed lands.” Since the Indians and the white settlers had two different viewpoints, the land, from some people’s perspective, was considered free territory. This area is also known as “Fair-Play” territory occupying the townships of Piatt, Porter, Old Lycoming, Watson and Woodward.\textsuperscript{15}

For 16 years, the number of squatters increased along the frontier pushing for a sense of order within the Fair Play community. The Fair Play territory could not legally arbitrate land disputes that occurred frequently throughout the area. Without local government, King and the other settlers banded together to form their own self-government known as the “Fair Play System.”\textsuperscript{16} Through this system, the Fair Play Men settled land disputes, adjudicated the guilt or innocence of suspected criminals, and meted out their own brand of punishment. Each March, settlers within the Fair Play Territory elected three commissioners who carried out the duties of their self-rule. If one were to disobey the laws established by the Fair Play Men, the person or “squatter” was shipped down the river in a canoe and asked not to return.\textsuperscript{17}

Prior to the Revolutionary War, King and his three brothers each acquired 200 hundred acres of land in Piatt Township, Lycoming County and settled there for about one year.\textsuperscript{18} He squatted on these “Indian Lands” outside the western jurisdiction of Pennsylvania and thus beyond the boundaries of the law. Unhappy with the desolate land the Pine Creek provided him, King relocated and squatted on “hill land” near Larry’s Creek in Piatt Township, Lycoming County.\textsuperscript{19} Poor soil left King empty handed when it came to farming, but thriving when it came to the endless amounts of timber. Making the best out of the land, King and his brothers “made up in quantity as they lacked quality.”\textsuperscript{20} King later removed himself to Lycoming Township, built a cabin on the land, and remained there until he entered the service of the Revolutionary War.\textsuperscript{21}

In the fall of 1777, thirty-four year old King volunteered as a militiaman while living in Lycoming Township and remained in service until the fall of 1778.\textsuperscript{22} He served under Colonel Henry Antes, builder of Fort Antes, located near Jersey Shore\textsuperscript{23} and Simon Coole, who served as Captain in the Third Battalion of the Sixth Company in the Northumberland County Militia.\textsuperscript{24} King marched with Colonel Antes to Fort Antes, which served as a refuge for the Fair Play Men and the inhabitants along the river,\textsuperscript{25} until the sacking of Lycoming in July of 1778.\textsuperscript{26} While at Fort Antes, King received orders from Colonel Hunter to vacate the fort as British Loyalists and British allied Native Americans were in the area.\textsuperscript{27}

That July, in what was known as the “Big Runaway,” King and other members of his company removed the women and children from the area and sent them on rafts down the Susquehanna to Fort Augusta.\textsuperscript{28} He remained in the town of Northumberland for six weeks until he was ordered to march to the Big Island, near present day Lock Haven, to take the cattle away from the Indians.\textsuperscript{29} Not only did the company take cattle, but also a great number of horses and sheep that they later took back to Northumberland.\textsuperscript{30} Although King served in the Revolutionary War for about one year and was vital to the evacuation of women and children during the “Big Runaway,” it did little for him economically as most of his land was destroyed. After the war, he returned to his

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Meginness, History of Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, 193.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} William Henry Egle, Notes and Queries: Historical, Biographical, and Genealogical, Relating Chiefly to the Interior Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: State Printer, 1883), Fourth Series, Vol., 1, 179.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} King, Pension Files.
\textsuperscript{22} King, Pension Files.
\textsuperscript{26} King, Pension Files.
\textsuperscript{27} King, Pension Files.
\textsuperscript{28} King, Pension Files.
\textsuperscript{29} King, Pension Files.
\textsuperscript{30} King, Pension Files.
farm in Lycoming Township (now Mifflin) and worked as a landless laborer. According to the 1786 tax lists of Lycoming Township, Northumberland County, Robert King only owned one horse and one cow to be taxed 3 shillings, well below the average tax of the town.31

Seven years after the end of the Revolutionary War, the brutal hostility between white settlers and the Indians continued. On September 1, 1790, the Provincial Council met in Philadelphia and Thomas Mifflin presented a message to the General Assembly concerning the murder of two friendly Indians in what is now Lycoming County. On August 31, 1790, it was brought before the court that Benjamin Walker, Henry Walker, Joseph Walker, and Samuel Doyle, residents of Pine Creek, “barbarously” murdered two friendly Indians belonging to the Seneca nation, and the government took actions to capture the murderers. The Council stated,

It is the utmost importance to the lives of the good people of this State, and a due execution of the laws, that the perpetrators of a crime so horrid, should be brought to condign and exemplary punishment: We have therefore thought proper to issue this proclamation, hereby engaging that the public reward of eight hundred dollars shall be paid to any persons who shall apprehend and secure the said Benjamin Walker, Henry Walker, Joseph Walker, and Samuel Doyle, or two hundred dollars for each and every one of them, to be paid on their conviction for the said offense.

The Council also ordered Robert King, knowledgeable about Pine Creek, to Indian country to deliver a speech and copies of a proclamation issued by the Council for the arrest of the murders. Not only did copies of the proclamation get sent to the Seneca Nation, but they were dispersed throughout the whole county. King returned with several speeches from the Chiefs stating,

We conceive it to be of great importance to the welfare of the good people of this State, that measures should immediately be taken for quieting the minds of the Indians. We, therefore request a conference with a committee of the General Assembly this morning on this subject.32

That morning, King attended the conference held with the General Assembly to supply information concerning the incident. It was agreed in conference that a reward of 100 pounds would be given to the family of the Indians and also a reward of 50 pounds to whoever arrested the murderers and secured them in the jail at Lancaster. In October, Samuel Doyle, one of the alleged murderers, was captured and put in the jail at Lancaster. The Walkers however, were never brought to justice for their crime as they fled to Ohio and served out the remainder of their days in Indiana and upstate New York. Similarly, Doyle was never convicted for taking part in the crime. At the end of the trial, King was awarded 75 pounds for delivering messages back and forth to the Seneca Nation and the Council meeting in Philadelphia. Following his return from Philadelphia, he returned to his farm, married Susanna Pierson in 1792, and together, had nine children.33

Having lived in Northumberland County, now present day Lycoming County for 60 years, Robert at the age 80 appeared in the Court of Common Pleas to apply for a pension for his service in the Revolutionary War.34 His pension, however, was denied. The commissioners did not believe he served in a military capacity as he “only” protected the lives and property of the inhabitants of the West Branch of the Susquehanna. King lived to be 94 years of age making him the last surviving Revolutionary War veteran in Lycoming County. He died on March 29, 1848 and was buried in West Wildwood Cemetery in Williamsport.

Robert Covenhoven, the “Paul Revere” of the West Branch

Robert Covenhoven was born of Dutch parentage in Monmouth County, New Jersey, December 7, 1755.35 However, at the start of the eighteenth century, many in New Jersey began migrating to Pennsylvania because of the abundance of land. This migration escalated after the French and Indian War because settlers and soldiers could now take up land in the Susquehanna River Valley in what would soon become Northumberland County. That county, created in 1772, stretched from the Lehigh River in the east to the Allegheny River in the west, covering much of the northern portion of Pennsylvania. The Susquehanna River dictated settlement within the

34. King, Pension Files.
county as it served as a valuable transportation method. Many diverse cultures seeking to capitalize on the benefits of the river looked towards the North and West branches of the Susquehanna. Nevertheless, while that area provided prosperity to some, it proved an absolute disaster to most. 36 Robert and his family experienced this hard reality first hand when they moved to the valley in 1772.

The valley attracted settlers from Connecticut and other portions of the middle colonies. However, because of the location, the valley sequestered its people from colonial institutions, thus creating critical problems as many settlers were sometimes over 100 miles away from the county seat. 37 As new settlers continued to move to Northumberland County, the demand for local governments increased. Sunbury, the county seat, proved particularly problematic for settlers located in the western and northern portions of the county. In response, those inhabitants pushed for a new county seat that was a reasonable distance from their homes. Nevertheless, the leaders in the colonial government, ever mindful of guarding their own power, refused these requests.

Compounding their difficulties, animosity between new settlers and Native Americans erupted in seemingly unsolvable land disputes and war. White settlers saw the valley as the key to their prosperity. However, the Indians who already lived there or used it as necessary hunting grounds, did not see the mere potential; it was already integral to their lives. 38 For the next 15 years, settlers and native peoples struggled over the land and their homes. Not only did Indian and colonial claimants fight each other, but the colonists fought amongst themselves. Due to conflicting royal patents, the colonial governments of Pennsylvania and Connecticut claimed title to the land. This jurisdictional quagmire, lasting over a decade, embroiled parts of the valley in a civil war known as the Pennamite-Yankee wars. 39

Robert Covenhoven’s life was molded out of these political, social, and cultural circumstances. Covenhoven arrived in Northumberland County as a distinguished hunter and axman. 40 Throughout the early 1770’s, hunters were classified as wandering “white Indians.” Inhabitants with titles to the land and the many land speculators looking to make easy profits despised these peripatetic “white Indians” who cut down timber and squatted on the land. 41

To make matters worse, Covenhoven lived in an area that could not legally arbitrate these disputes. He squatted on “Indian lands” between Lycoming and Pine Creeks and thus beyond the boundaries of the law. 42 Without local government, Covenhoven and several other members of the area banded together and created their own self-government known as the “Fair-Play System.” 43 Through this system, the Fair Play Men settled land disputes, adjudicated the guilt or innocence of suspected criminals, and meted out their own brand of punishment. It was a crucial experience with popular sovereignty that shaped their understanding of the revolution.

Already existing independent of the empire, and harboring a great deal of animosity toward the colonial government, many of the Fair Play Men, including Covenhoven, joined the revolutionary cause. In 1776, at the age of twenty-one, Covenhoven volunteered in the Rifle Company commanded by Colonel James Murray. Unlike many of his neighbors’ experiences in the war, Covenhoven marched to the state of New Jersey under the command of General George Washington to fight the Hessians soldiers in the Battle of Trenton. 44 After the battle, Covenhoven distinguished himself by saving a young woman who the Hessians robbed, stripped her of her clothing, and tied to a tree. 45 Later that year, under the command of General George Washington, Covenhoven participated in the Battle of Princeton where he and his troops captured 300 Hessians and made them prisoners of war. 46 After fighting in the Battles of Trenton and Princeton, Robert Covenhoven’s enlistment expired and he returned to the valley. 47

Just because his enlistment expired did not mean that the war was over for Covenhoven. For most of his adult life, he helped protect his community from Native American threats, Connecticut claimants, and even local criminals. The Revolutionary War for Covenhoven was no different. It was a fight to preserve his family, friends, and neighbors and he used whatever skills he had to do just that. Once home, Robert Covenhoven volunteered in the company of William Hepburn for the purpose of protecting his community from Indian raids. 48 With a solid background in the county’s surroundings and location, William Hepburn appointed Covenhoven as the leader of the scouting and spying parties. 49

Covenhoven’s skills proved useful on June 10, 1778, the bloodiest day in Lycoming County history. That morning, British allied Native Americans and loyalists attacked small villages on the northern and western branches of the Susquehanna. 50 According to one local historian, on that day “children were murdered before their parents’ eyes; husbands were compelled to witness the horrid deaths of

37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
42. Covenhoven, Pension Files.
44. Covenhoven, Pension Files.
45. Egle, Pennsylvania Women in the American Revolution, 55.
46. Covenhoven, Pension Files.
47. Covenhoven, Pension Files.
48. Covenhoven, Pension Files.
49. Covenhoven, Pension Files.
50. Meginness, History of Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, 122.
their wives—and in turn children were compelled to gaze upon the mangled bodies of their parents.”51 While such a statement seems like morbid hyperbole, it nonetheless reflected the reality of war on the West Branch. Unable to cope with the sheer magnitude of the onslaught and lacking ammunition, Colonel Hunter ordered a mass evacuation of the West Branch of the Susquehanna Valley.52 In fear, the panicked settlers gathered their belongings and sent them down the river. Women and children were evacuated on rafts while the men protected them alongside the riverbanks.53 The evacuation brought fear and confusion as most settlers expected to be captured, killed, or worse, scalped by the Indians.54

Meanwhile, William Hepburn had no way of informing the rest of the countryside of these Indian attacks.55 Robert Covenhoven and a young millwright volunteered to carry orders to Fort Antes and then to Sunbury.56 After Covenhoven delivered messages to Sunbury, he returned to Fort Muncy to remove his family to Fort Augusta.57 According to Covenhoven.

I took my own family safely to Sunbury and came back in the keelboat to secure my furniture. Just as I rounded a point above Derrstown [now Lewisburg, Union County], I met the whole convoy from all the forts above. Such a sight I never saw in all my life. Boats, canoes, hog-troughs, rafts, hastily made of dry sticks, every sort of floating article had been put in requisition and was crowded with women, children, and plunder. Whenever an obstruction occurred at any shoal or ripple, the woman would leap out into the water, put their shoulders to the boat or raft, and launch it again into deep water. The men of the settlement came down in single file on each side of the river to guard the woman and children. The whole convoy arrived safely at Sunbury, leaving the entire range of farms along the West Branch to the ravages of the Indians.58

For his actions, Covenhoven became known as the “Paul Revere” of the West Branch.59 Following the “Big Runaway,” Colonel Daniel Brodhead commissioned Covenhoven as the head guide to all the scouting parties.60 In his new position, Covenhoven often guided scouting parties to Fort Jenkins located near present day Bloomsburg.61 Under the command of Colonel Thomas Hartley, he also guided troops to Tioga Point to defend the area from John Butler,62 the frontier bogeyman and loyalist who served as a Captain in the British Army.63 Colonel Hartley stated,

We were told that young Butler had been at Tioga a few hours before we came—that he had 300 men with him, the most of them were Tories, dressed in green—that they were returned towards Chemung, 12 miles off and they determined to give us battle in some of the Defiles near it.64

Despite Butler's infamous character, Hartley believed he could rely on Covenhoven who was a “sensible” and intelligent young man who was well acquainted with the area of Tioga.65 When the troops arrived at Tioga Point, located in Bradford County, Pennsylvania, Covenhoven and the troops captured the enemy's stores.66 Covenhoven also set fire to the palace of Queen Esther, leader of the Munsee Indians.67 Jubilant, Hartley related to state officials, “We burnt Tioga Queen Hester’s Palace or town, and all the settlements on this side; several canoes were taken and some plunder, part of which was destroyed.”68 Soon after the burning of Queen Esther's palace, Colonel Hartley and Covenhoven made their way back to the valley and immediately faced a party of Indian warriors gathered near Fort Muncy.69 After this engagement, Colonel Hartley left Fort Muncy to join the Sullivan Expedition, and Captain Hepburn and Covenhoven remained at Fort Muncy to protect the inhabitants from the “savages.”70

Although Covenhoven, the “Paul Revere” of the West Branch, served in the war for more than two years and was integral to the protection of the valley, it did little for him economically. After the war, he returned to his home, renting a small cottage and working as a landless laborer to support not only himself, but also his wife. According to the 1785 tax lists of Muncy Township, Northumberland County, Robert Covenhoven only had enough personal property to be taxed six shillings, well below the average tax of the town.71

Robert Covenhoven attended the Pine Creek Church located near Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania until late in his life. The church's congregation met under a large tree on the

---

52. Meginness, History of Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, 135.
54. Ibid., 135.
55. Ibid., 134.
56. Covenhoven, Pension Files.
57. Egle, Pennsylvania Women in the American Revolution, 56.
60. Covenhoven, Pension Files.
62. Covenhoven, Pension Files.
64. Meginness, Otzinachson, 554.
66. Covenhoven, Pension Files.
68. Meginness, Otzinachson, 554-555.
69. Covenhoven, Pension Files.
70. Covenhoven, Pension Files.
west bank of the Pine Creek River.\(^{72}\) Towards the end of their lives, Covenhoven and his wife changed their names from “Covenhoven” to “Crownover.”\(^{73}\) Robert’s wife died on November 27, 1843 leaving behind her husband and eight children.\(^{74}\) Having lived in Northumberland County, now present day Lycoming County for the duration of his life, Covenhoven at the age of 76 appeared in the Court of Common Pleas to apply for a pension for his service in the Revolutionary War.\(^{75}\) Covenhoven received the approval of his pension and lived to be 90 years of age passing away 14 years after he filed for a pension for his service.\(^{76}\) According to a nineteenth century historian, John F. Meginness, the writer of Otzinhachson: History of the West Branch Valley of the Susquehanna, Robert Covenhoven “was one of those men who had always put forward when danger and hard work were to be encountered, but forgotten when honors and emoluments were distributed.”\(^{77}\) Robert Covenhoven died on October 29, 1846 and was buried at the old Presbyterian Church located in Northumberland County, Pennsylvania.\(^{78}\)

**Richard Martin**

Richard Martin, like Covenhoven, was born in eastern New Jersey in 1761 to Dutch parents.\(^{79}\) In the late 1760s, they relocated to Sunbury in Northumberland County where the point of the North and West Branches of the Susquehanna join. Following the Martins’ arrival in Sunbury, his father, Robert, established a tavern commonly referred to as “Martin’s Tavern.”\(^{80}\) Martin’s Tavern was an important gathering place for settlers up and down the Susquehanna Valley during the colonial and revolutionary period.\(^{81}\) In colonial Pennsylvania, the tavern not only served as place for entertainment and lodging, but it was a key establishment in the social and political realms. In rural frontier towns, taverns were gateways to the outer world as they provided newspapers and fostered political debates. During the Revolutionary War, local governments met at taverns to discuss matters regarding the war. In addition, when it was time to protect the community, taverns served as military stations where ordinary men voluntarily joined the ranks of the Continental Army or the militia.\(^{82}\)

After the French and Indian War, the people of Northumberland County, most likely at “Martin’s Tavern” formed military organizations to protect the inhabitants of the frontier.\(^{83}\) Unsupported by the colonial government, these extralegal military organizations were significantly voluntary. That volitional experience made it easy for men to mobilize during the revolution and Robert Martin’s position as a tavern owner put him into new leadership roles. In 1774, the Committees of Correspondence at Philadelphia urged the men of Northumberland County to establish township elected committees on which Robert, deeply involved in the politics of revolution, served. Robert also served as a delegate to both the Provincial and Constitutional Conventions that created the most radical democratic state constitution in the Union.\(^{84}\)

Following in his father’s revolutionary footsteps, eighteen year old Richard Martin entered the service of the Revolutionary War in 1778 under the command of Captain James Chatham.\(^{85}\) Chatham commanded the Seventh Company in the Second Battalion in the Northumberland County Militia.\(^{86}\)

Martin’s experience in the war revolved around the protection of his community. Martin, like his father, was quickly elevated to a prominent position. The new militia, reflecting the democratic spirit of revolution, elected its officers. Richard, obviously popular amongst the rest of the soldiers, was voted in as First Lieutenant, a position in which he served “until the conclusion of the war.” While in that service, Martin helped erect redoubts and stockades “for the defense of the inhabitants against the hostile Indians that

---

74. Ibid.
75. Covenhoven, Pension Files.
77. Meginness, Otzinhachson, 615.
81. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Martin, Pension Files.
infested the county” and he “frequently went out on scouting parties to search, and drive back the Indians.” Late in life, Richard liked to reflect on the fact that he “frequently took command of such parties himself.” Symbolic of his deep animosity for native peoples, Martin relished the fact that he joined Colonel Henry Antes in “repelling the savages” from the West Branch of the Susquehanna to Great Island (near present day Lock Haven). Unlike Covenhoven, Martin’s entire revolutionary experience occurred in the valley. He lived there, fought there, and would die there.

Although Martin served in the war for six years and his family was integral to the formation and protection of the revolutionary state, it did little for him economically. After the war, the young lieutenant returned to domestic life paying in the town.89 Although Martin served in the war for six years and his family was integral to the formation and protection of the revolutionary state, it did little for him economically. After the war, the young lieutenant returned to domestic life paying in the town.89

Sometime after 1785, Richard Martin and his parents relocated from Northumberland County to Newberry, Lycoming County where he married Sophia Reece and together they had two children, Robert and James. While in Lycoming County, Richard’s father established the first grist mill located near Newberry in 1789.90 Richard’s father and his family, like Covenhoven, associated themselves with the Presbyterian religion and when it came time for the creation of a church in Newberry, Richard’s father was the first to donate money in its favor.91 However, later in his life, Richard connected himself with the Methodist Episcopal Church under the Reverend William Turner of Jersey Shore.92

Despite Martin’s low socioeconomic status, he and his family still remained active in politics. In the 1790s, people who were located more than 50 miles from the county seat at Sunbury expressed their grievances and pushed for a division of Northumberland County. Because of these petitions, Pennsylvania created Lycoming County out of Northumberland in 1795. Governor Mifflin appointed four judges, one of which was William Hepburn, commander of his own company in the Northumberland County Militia during the Revolutionary War.93 As the time came for the selection of the county seat in the newly formed county, two possible options would later spark disagreement within the people of the county – Jaysburg, an established old frontier town located near Newberry and an underdeveloped town, presently known as Williamsport, located on a swamp.94

William Hepburn and Michael Ross, founder of Williamsport, joined together to make Williamsport the county seat, sparking animosity in Jaysburg.95 Jaysburg citizens, who wanted the county seat in their town, feared that the ever flooding Williamsport would spread disease. Richard Martin was one of the outraged citizens and took direct action. According to the Lycoming County Quarter Sessions in November 1795, Richard Martin viciously assaulted Michael Ross.96 Despite opposition, the county seat of Lycoming County remains presently in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

Having lived in Northumberland and Lycoming County for the majority of his life, Richard at the age of 72 appeared in the local Court of Common Pleas to apply for a pension for his service in the Revolutionary War.97 Richard received the approval of his pension and lived to be 76 years of age. Richard Martin died on June 6, 1836 and was buried at Pine Creek Cemetery located in Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania.98

Conclusion:

These three men encapsulate the revolutionary experience of the valley. They came from distant places, represented different ethnicities that cut to the heart of the prized heterogeneity of Pennsylvania, and served out their time in the war committed to the valley and its inhabitants. They and their families were all crucial to the war in the West Branch; yet, what is all the more striking, none of these three men gained much from the war. They did not become great men on great estates, but remained simple republicans, attached to their land, their families, and their communities. That republican ethos ran deep in the valley and guided their decisions and actions. There was no such thing as individualism or self-interest for Covenhoven, King, or Martin; they were not sunshine patriots. The good of the public, res publica, ruled all.

87. Martin, Pension Files.
88. Martin, Pension Files.
90. DAR, Eighteenth Report, 72.
92. Ibid., 100.
94. Ibid., 223.
95. Ibid.
97. Martin, Pension Files.
98. DAR, Eighteenth Report, 72.
Maggie Slawson is a Senior History Major at Lycoming College. Her research interests center upon the American Revolution and Colonial/Revolutionary Pennsylvania. In her research, she studies the motivations of ordinary soldiers and their willingness to fight in the Revolutionary War as well as the transformation of the Pennsylvania Frontier. Maggie will obtain a Bachelor’s Degree in History in May 2017. In 2014, Maggie volunteered at the James V. Brown Library creating historical displays based upon original research and was an Archival Intern at the Lycoming County Historical Society. The summer after, Maggie received the Andrew W. Mellon Research Grant and conducted original research on Revolutionary War soldiers and also transcribed several of their pensions. Maggie was selected to participate in the annual Phi Alpha Theta National History Honor Society conference where she presented a paper titled: Out of Oblivion: Revolutionary Soldiers and the Pennsylvania Frontier. With that said, in October, Maggie presented her poster titled: The Forgotten Men of the Susquehanna River Valley at the annual Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission Conference in Shippenburg, taking third place. Maggie was a 2016 recipient of the summer internship program at George Washington’s Mount Vernon where she was employed in the Historic Trades Department as well as interning at the George Washington National Library.

Maggie is a member of the Lycoming College Volleyball team as well as an employee at the Lycoming College Archives. She tutors several history classes and serves as a teaching assistant in the Biology Department. After Lyco, Maggie hopes to pursue a Masters Degree in Public History in hopes to become an Archivist.

Dr. Christopher Pearl is an Assistant Professor of History at Lycoming College and co-coordinator of the American Studies program. “My research and teaching interests center upon the political, religious, social and legal history of America to 1877. In my classes, students explore fascinating topics such as the Salem Witch Trials, the vigilante actions of the Regulators in colonial North America, the popular politics of the American Revolution, and the intersection of law and society in early America.”

Dr. Pearl received his Bachelor of Arts from St. John Fisher College, his Master’s from SUNY Brockport and his Ph.D., from Binghamton University.
It is appropriate that on the 150th anniversary of our city, we remember a man who helped transition Williamsport into the modern era. In 1866, when Williamsport was officially incorporated as a city, John R.T. Ryan arrived in Williamsport. For the next five decades the city of Williamsport and John R.T. Ryan would grow and prosper together. It is puzzling that so little is known of him today.

He was a popular subject in the social pages of the local newspapers for decades. There is an impressive quantity of old newspaper articles mentioning Ryan and his many enterprises. Today his name might be recognized by a few local historians, but little has been written of his life and accomplishments.

His Early Life

John Roselle Tucker (R.T.) Ryan was born in Trenton, New Jersey in 1839, the son of Thomas and Mary Ryan (nee Carman), both of Irish ancestry. Ryan’s mother was widowed from her first marriage to Charles B. Vansyckel, a successful merchant in the retail pharmacy business in Trenton. Her second marriage was to Ryan’s father, who was born in Ireland. The family provided the young John R.T. Ryan with the opportunity of a private education at the Trenton Academy, a Presbyterian school.

The War of the Rebellion

After attending the Trenton Academy, Ryan worked in the family business with his step brother C.B. Vansyckel II, until the outbreak of the Civil War. In 1861, Ryan enlisted in Company G, 10th Regiment of the New Jersey Volunteers, and was commissioned a second lieutenant. At some point in his military service Ryan was listed as “disabled” and his duties were temporarily reassigned to the staff of Brigadier Generals Wadsworth and Martindale. He was eventually reassigned to Peck’s Division, Seventh Corps, serving in the Army of the Potomac. He was honorably discharged in 1863.

The Home at 151 East Third Street

In 1866, Ryan married Emeline (Lina) Tinsman, the daughter of one of Williamsport’s most successful lumberman pioneers, Garrett Tinsman. They were married in the Tinsman homestead on East Third Street. A few years later, in 1869, Ryan purchased the property next to the Tinsman home. He and his wife Lina built a spacious three story French Second Empire style mansion that still stands today at 151 East Third Street. They raised three children and the couple would live there until Ryan’s death in 1918. When Ryan’s father-in-law Garrett Tinsman died in 1888, Ryan had an enclosed bridgeway built between the Tinsman and Ryan homes so the Ryans could attend to Mrs. Tinsman. In those days that section of East Third Street was lined with many grand homes and was part of what is now being referred to as “The Original Millionaires Row” in the “Old City.” Today only a few of the original Victorian structures remain east of Mulberry Street.

The Enterprising Mr. Ryan

In 1867, Ryan joined the firm of Woolverton and Tinsman and began learning the lumber business from his father-in-law. He quickly demonstrated the talent that would make him one of the most successful entrepreneurs in Williamsport. From that first stepping stone, Ryan launched a career of creating a multitude of successful and diverse enterprises. As Williamsport emerged into a modern city, many of his businesses helped establish the very fabric of city commerce.

Ryan and his father-in-law soon established Tinsman and Ryan, a lumber manufacturer. Not long after, Ryan established two other partnerships, Ryan, Cochran and Company (with J. Henry Cochran) and Ryan, Thomson...
and Company, both substantial lumber manufacturing concerns.

Early on in his career, Ryan, being a member of the Lumberman’s Exchange, had insight into the inevitable end of the lumbering era and began to diversify his energy and interests. He chose to involve himself in enterprises that raised the living standards of the public by bringing modern technology to the city. He even dabbled in the ideas of a local inventor, Joseph Hill, with whom he shared a U.S. patent for a passenger railway car brake, and starter device.

Although Ryan himself has been all but forgotten, so many of the enterprises he established helped define our city. Ryan was either a principal investor, a director, or president of the following businesses:

**Manufacturing**
- Tinsman and Ryan, Lumber
- Ryan, Cochran and Company, Lumber
- Ryan, Thomson and Company, Lumber
- Williamsport Hydraulic Brick Company
- J.E. Dayton Company, Boots and Shoes
- Lewars and Company, Hardware
- Lycoming Wireless Umbrella Company
- Kenmore Shoe Company
- Fisher and Hinkle Company, Biscuits and Confectionery

**Utilities**
- Lycoming Electric Company
- Eagles Mere Electric Company
- Williamsport Passenger Railway Company
- East End Passenger Railway Company
- Williamsport Steam Company
- Williamsport Water Company

**Real Estate**
- Eagles Mere Land Company
- Ulman Opera House
- Grampian Land Company
- The Grampian Farm
- Ryan Business Block, Market Street
- Ryan Business Block, Mulberry and Third Streets

**Mining**
- Kettle Creek Coal Mining Company, Bitumen, Pa.

**Railroads**
- Susquehanna and Buffalo Railroad
- Eagles Mere Railroad

**Banking**
- Williamsport National Bank
- West Branch National Bank
- City National Bank

**A Brick and Mortar Businessman**
It might be best to describe John R. T. Ryan as a brick and mortar, venture capitalist. While many of his business associates were speculative investors in his many enterprises, few were more than minor investors who may or may not have brought some level of expertise to his enterprises. Ryan’s true talent was demonstrated in his ability to create and organize enterprises that set ideas and commerce in motion. He built businesses that provided the local economy with goods and services. He created employment for local residents, while generating wealth for himself and promoting overall prosperity for the community.

**The Lycoming Electric Company and “The War of Currents”**
One example of his many businesses is the story of the Lycoming Electric Company. Local historians have attributed the successful application of electricity in Williamsport to the well-known local businessman Hiram R. Rhoads. It is without a doubt that Mr. Rhoads was intimately involved in the successful establishment of electric lighting in our city. However, the role that John R.T. Ryan played in comparison to Hiram Rhoads is complicated, and their collaboration in that venture was not without controversy. In 1882 the Edison Electric Company came to Williamsport. Under the direction of E.A. Rowley, the Edison Electric Company had established a power plant with a modest power grid downtown. At first the Edison “Direct Current” system served a handful of businesses, industrial plants, and a few residences east of Market Street. It is well documented that the Edison Electric Company of Williamsport was not a profitable enterprise and struggled for many years due to the inherent limitations and higher costs using the “Direct Current” system.

By the mid 1880’s, the Edison and Westinghouse Companies were embroiled in what became known as “The War of Currents,” an epic battle between Thomas Edison’s “Direct Current” and George Westinghouse’s “Alternating Current” systems. The many battles of this war were fought in cities all across the United States, and Williamsport was no exception. The inherent economic advantages of Westinghouse’s “Alternating Current” system would ultimately lead to its success and dominance in our city and nationwide.

In August of 1889, the City Select Council had awarded a contract to two individuals, R.C. Garhart and Hiram R. Rhoads, to provide 175 electric arc street lights throughout the city. Interestingly, these two gentlemen had formed no apparent organization to fulfill the requirements of the contract. By September, John R. T. Ryan had organized the Lycoming Electric Company, with he and his brother-in-law Garrett D. Tinsman being the majority investors and directors. Ryan served as President and Hiram Rhoads as...
Garhart, and Rhoads. The action was unsuccessful and the project moved forward. Ryan and his partners had prevailed and by December, utilizing the Westinghouse “Alternating Current” system, the streets were illuminated with electric light.

It’s reasonable to conclude that Ryan and Rhoads had previously made plans to collaborate in this venture. To undertake such a complex task in a few short months would seem impossible. If it truly happened as documented, then what Ryan and Rhoads had accomplished was even more impressive. We may never know the details, but we do know that Ryan was the principal organizer of the enterprise that brought the endeavor to fruition.

In 1894, city officials raised allegations that Ryan’s company hadn’t provided the required capacity of lighting and was therefore in default of the contract. An engineer from Westinghouse of Pittsburgh was dispatched to Williamsport. His investigation confirmed that the Lycoming Electric system was providing the proper illumination that the contract had specified. For a second time, Ryan’s company had prevailed.

**White vs Ryan and the Lycoming Improvement Company**

In addition to his involvement with the Lycoming Electric Company, Ryan and his associates were also major investors in the Williamsport Passenger Railway Company as well as the East End Passenger Railway Company. Both railway systems were electrified and powered by the Lycoming Electric Company. There were several other railway systems established in the city as well, increasing competition and lowering profits.

In 1894, along with some investors, J. Henry Cochran, well known as both a political and financial power in Williamsport at that time, organized the Lycoming Improvement Company. The Lycoming Improvement Company’s focus was to purchase as much infrastructure in the city as possible, consolidate services, and eliminate competition. They solicited to purchase the stocks of the Lycoming Electric Company, Edison Electric Company, Williamsport Railway Company, East End Railway Company, Williamsport Steam Works, and Williamsport Water Company, among others.

With the encouragement of Hiram Rhoads, Ryan and a majority of his partners agreed to sell their shares. Before the transaction was completed, Hiram Rhoads died unexpectedly. Still, Ryan went through with the sale. A few of the partners objected to the deal, one being Henry White. Feeling that they were left out of the negotiations, they filed a suit against Ryan and the other directors. The “White vs Ryan” suit was widely publicized. After weeks of legal arguments and many newspaper articles covering every word of testimony, the court found in favor of Ryan and his partners and the case was dismissed. The Lycoming Improvement Company would later become the foundation of our present day River Valley Transit System, and one of the many consolidated electric companies that became Pennsylvania Power and Light Company in the early part of the 20th century.

**The Eagles Mere Land Syndicate**

If you have ever spent a day in Eagles Mere, PA and enjoyed the beauty of the unspoiled lake shore, its cottages, and serene atmosphere, you have something in common with (and a reason to thank) John R.T. Ryan. If you visit the Eagles Mere Museum one day, you will find on display the first stock certificate of the Eagles Mere Land Company owned, and signed by the company president, John R.T. Ryan.

In 1892, John R.T. Ryan and three other men, Robert Allen of Williamsport, James Gamble of Hughesville, and Benjamin Welke of Philadelphia, formed the Eagles Mere Land Syndicate. They purchased the property surrounding the lake at Eagles Mere and planned a resort community for the enjoyment of local cottagers and visitors from the big northeast cities. Ryan was, by all accounts, an avid outdoorsman and spent a considerable amount of his free time at his cottage in Eagles Mere enjoying the lake and the surrounding woodlands. Ryan’s role in the formation of what became the Eagles Mere Land Company was significant, according to the well-known Lycoming County Historian, John F. Meginness.

In History of Lycoming County published in 1892, Meginness stated: “Mr. Ryan was one of the prime movers in the purchase of Eagles Mere, and it is largely through his untiring efforts that it became a successful summer resort.”

Ryan was a principal in building the infrastructure of Eagles Mere as well. He was an investor and officer in the Eagles Mere Electric Company, Eagles Mere Water Company, and the Eagles Mere Railroad bringing visitors to the popular resort town.

Ryan, being one of the early cottagers at the lake, saw his home nearly destroyed twice within a few years by tornadoes. Both times he did not hesitate to rebuild. After his death it was nearly destroyed again by fire in 1921. Unfortunately, Ryan’s cottage disappeared from the landscape of Eagles Mere a few decades later.
Success and Happy Times
By the 1890’s, Ryan’s many successes had brought him substantial wealth. His children were nearly all grown and educated. In 1894, his eldest daughter Florence had married Dr. Patrick Sarsfield Donnellen, a very well-known and accomplished physician in Philadelphia. There was an elegant wedding at their home on East Third Street. A newspaper article described the wedding, detailing extravagant decorations and identifying many guests and dignitaries from Europe and across the country. Lavish wedding gifts, including a stately home in Philadelphia were also mentioned. Ryan’s son, Garrett Tinsman Ryan, graduated from Princeton in the early 1890’s and worked for his father in their mining operations at the Kettle Creek Coal and Iron Mine in Bitumen, PA. In 1898 Garrett was appointed as Vice Consul to Uruguay. He and his wife soon moved to South America. Ryan’s namesake, his grandson John Roselle Tucker (R.T) Ryan II, was born in Uruguay in the same year.

A Family Plagued by Tragedy
Tragedy soon struck the Ryan family. In 1899, an unexpected and unchecked epidemic of the Black Plague ravaged Uruguay, quarantining the country and blocking any means of transportation outbound. When the quarantine was lifted, Ryan’s family traveled to Uruguay to retrieve the then very ill Garrett, along with his family. His affliction was not documented but he was in such frail health that he and his family soon after moved to Arizona. He died there in 1907 at the early age of 35, Garrett’s body was returned to Williamsport and a funeral was held at the family home on East Third Street.

In 1905, Florence’s husband Dr. Donnellen became gravely ill and was forced to abandon his position and practice. They moved to the west coast and settled in Coronado, California. In 1912, while attending to the poor health of her husband, Florence contracted and succumbed to pneumonia. Her husband died a few years later. Their funerals were also held at the home on East Third Street.

A Shot Across the Bow
After the death of their children, Ryan and his wife Lina traveled the world on several lengthy voyages, often taking their grandson John R.T. Ryan II. One of their last voyages was marred by danger when returning home on the S.S. Kaiser Wilhelm II. Described in a newspaper article titled “A Shot Across the Bow,” their ship happened to pass through British waters on the day Great Britain declared war on Germany in 1914. According to the accounts of Ryan and other passengers, their ship was fired upon by British forces and narrowly escaped.

A Man of Faith, Modesty, and Charity
Ryan in his 70’s had endured the insufferable loss of two children. Being a long time member of the First Presbyterian Church near his home on the corner of Mulberry and Third Streets, he dedicated most of his time and energies to his Christian faith. Many years before, he had served on the building committee for the construction of the present day church. He became friends with a rather famous evangelist, author, and explorer Dr. William Edgar Geil of Doylestown, PA. Their letters of correspondence are part of a historic collection at the Doylestown Historic Society.

Ryan and his wife Lina were trustees in several charitable organizations as well, including the YMCA, the Industrial Home for Boys, and the American Red Cross. Ryan was a long time member of the Loyal Legion and the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.). He also served several years on the Williamsport Common Council.

While researching Mr. Ryan, it has been difficult to find much about him personally, but there are a few clues that have left an impression of his personal modesty. The first indication was when the city was illuminated by his Lycoming Electric Company on December 2, 1889. There was a grand parade through the streets with many residents and dignitaries accompanied by the Fisk Military Band. They walked to the homes of each of the prominent directors of the company to acknowledge and thank them publicly. They stopped at each home and serenaded them until they came out to speak. Their last stop was to thank Ryan at his home. The crowd serenaded him, but Ryan didn’t appear. Instead he asked a representative to apologize to the crowd and thank them on his behalf, since he could not speak “due to illness, or perhaps out of modesty.”
A second clue was when a flood devastated downtown Williamsport in 1889. Ryan owned many store front buildings that were flooded and his tenants’ businesses were badly affected. Ryan privately told his tenants that their rent would be free that month to help them recover and get back into operation. A newspaper reporter heard about his generosity but Ryan declined to comment. The reporter wrote this brief article: From the Gazette & Bulletin July 9, 1889

“Donated a Month’s Rent.”

Mr. John R.T. Ryan is one of those gentlemen who do not press their names to the front in an act of benevolence, but this reporter, when he gets hold of anything of the kind, deems it his duty to not withhold it from the public. Mr. Ryan is the owner of a number of storerooms, and to the tenants of these rooms he has donated a month’s rent on account of the flood.”

Consistent with several other similar accounts, it appears that Ryan believed that acts of charity and benevolence were to be done privately and without personal recognition.

Irony for a Forgotten Man

Of the many things uncovered about John R.T. Ryan’s life, one detail in particular is rather ironic. It would interest the reader to know that in 1907 the Lycoming County Historical Society was founded and of the original charter members listed, one was John Roselle Tucker (R.T.) Ryan.

His Passing

John R.T. Ryan passed away in a Philadelphia hospital on March 20th, 1918 from heart complications. His body was returned to Williamsport and his funeral was held in his home, like his two children’s home that he and his wife Lina built nearly a half century before. In 1919, Lina Ryan sold the family home and moved to West 4th Street with their only surviving daughter, Mary. Unlike other successful men of Williamsport who made their fortunes and moved on to other opportunities and places, John R.T. Ryan spent the balance of his life from 1866 to his death in 1918, in the city of Williamsport.

Ryan’s Contribution

It is very difficult to summarize the life and accomplishments of a man like John R.T. Ryan on a few pages. One could write an article on any one of his many enterprises, or of his personal experiences. In preparing this article, it has been enlightening to discover how many others, who, like Ryan, were part of the daily commercial life of our city. They may not have attained much popularity or recognition for their efforts, but they played an important role in the development of our community. They were men of optimism and action, who, when recognizing a good idea or opportunity, didn’t hesitate to take a risk and venture into a new enterprise. It was a time when nearly everything a resident of Williamsport could purchase was made at the many local businesses by their fellow citizens.

Williamsport, in Ryan’s era, was a center of manufacturing and commerce. It attracted a large number of people who settled here because there was an opportunity to find jobs and raise their families, jobs that were created by the very enterprises that these men established. Many of us are the descendants of the people who came to our city seeking those opportunities. Perhaps, the greatest accomplishment of John R.T. Ryan wasn’t his many enterprises, his great fortune, or his charity, but it was his contribution to creating the opportunities for prosperity that subsequently benefited the citizens of Williamsport.

A Proper Epitaph

John R.T. Ryan was buried in the Tinsman family plot at Wildwood Cemetery, in Williamsport. Many newspapers covered Ryan’s death with articles stating: “John R.T. Ryan Dead,” “One of the wealthiest men in Williamsport,” and “He made a fortune in the lumber business.” Not a very touching or appropriate epitaph for a man of such accomplishments and character.

In his 1892 edition of the History of Lycoming County, John F. Mcginness wrote, about Ryan, what would have been a more fitting epitaph:

“Every worthy cause finds in Mr. Ryan a warm friend and generous supporter, and he is recognized as one of the most enterprising citizens of his adopted home.”

Research contributions by: Nancy McCurdy of the Lycoming County Genealogical Society and Bruce Huffman.

About the Author

Matt DiRocco is a local businessman and a lifelong resident of Lycoming County. He and his wife Yvonne are the owners of the John R.T. Ryan home at 151 East Third Street. They are presently in the process of preserving, restoring, and repurposing the building.
I spotted the Baptismal Certificate in the basement of Roller Mills East in Lewisburg. It was a pretty certificate with pink and yellow roses, framed in a white frame with gilt highlights. When I was a teenager and in college, I collected certificates just like this. I felt that they were abandoned by the family and needed a home. As I viewed the certificate, I realized that it was highlighting the birth of a young lady from Piatt Township, Lycoming County. This certificate has now found a good and permanent home at the Lycoming County Historical Society. But who was this child?

As I soon learned, the quiet and unassuming certificate revealed a dramatically interesting and heroic life…

Etta Alice Neff was born June 17, 1891, in Larryville, Jersey Shore, the daughter of John David and Sarah “Sallie’ Wurster Neff. According to the Federal Census of 1900 for Piatt Township, John and Sallie had at that time seven children; Etta was the second youngest. John, by profession, was a farmer. Etta was educated at the Larryville School. At the time of Etta’s death in 1993, it was noted that she was the oldest living graduate of the Larryville School.

It is interesting to piece together the tidbits of someone’s life. For the next reference I found is Etta’s acceptance to the Rochester General Hospital Nursing School. At twenty years old, she entered on January 16, 1912. Etta, achieving an overall grade of 88, graduated February 13, 1915. In the same year, William C. Gorgas, the Surgeon General, requested Dr. John M. Swan to organize a military general hospital to serve in Europe in the event that the United States would be drawn into war. With the inevitable entry into war, the hospital was activated in February 1918. Base Hospital #19, as it was known, drew staff from the hospitals of Rochester city and the nursing alumni from Rochester General Hospital School of Nursing.

Etta was called into active service in the Army Nursing Corps May 3, 1918. Only weeks later, she sailed to France where she served as an Army Nurse at Base Hospital #19 at Vichy. According to the official history of the Rochester Regional Health system, “in July 1918 they were the second medical unit to arrive at the hospital center established in Vichy, France, where they set up a 1,000 bed hospital. Between July 1918 and February 1919 the unit treated 11,000 patients.” In John M. Swan’s A history of United States army base hospital no. 19, American Expeditionary Forces, Vichy, France, APO 781 (Rochester, N.Y.: Wegman-Walsh press, 1922), Etta is listed on page 85, “Etta. A. Neff Larrys Creek, Pa.” She is one of only four nurses from Pennsylvania, the others being Kate Baker, Harrisburg, Dorothy E. (Mrs. M. McCarrell) Beck, Alba, and Fannie C. Owens, Strattonville.

Oh, how I wish, on that same day at Roller Mills, I would have found a bundle of letters written in Vichy, outlining the life of Miss Neff! I’m sure her experiences were all at once, exhilarating, frightening, and depressing as injured soldiers were brought in. Illness and death were constant companions to the young nurse.

Etta served overseas from June 4, 1918 until February 12, 1919. She received an Honorable Discharge in Baltimore, North Carolina.

After the war, she served as a school nurse in Tonawanda, New York and later as a switchboard operator at Jersey Shore Hospital.

Etta married George William Gooding. He was a good deal older than Etta. Born March 18, 1864, Gooding died April 30, 1949. The couple apparently had one child George William, who was born in 1925 and died in 1926.

Etta died on March 12, 1993 at aged 101. She is buried in Muncy Cemetery. Even though it appears that Etta had no other children, it is assumed that she was survived by the children of her brothers and sisters. To date I have not been able to secure an image of this courageous World War I nurse. Should any of our readers have further information concerning Etta Neff Gooding, we would be pleased to receive it.

A special note of thanks to Kathleen Emerson Britton, Director/Curator of Collections, Rochester Medical Museum and Archives, Rochester, New York.
About the Author

Gary W. Parks is the Executive Director of the Thomas T. Taber Museum of the Lycoming County Historical Society, a position he has held since January 2011. He also serves as Editor of the Journal. He was no stranger to the museum when hired, however. From 1992 until 2005, Gary served in various capacities as the Museum’s Archivist, Acting Collections Manager and Guest Curator. Gary is a graduate of Towson University with B.S. degrees in Biology and English and a graduate of the University of North Carolina with a M.A. in History with a concentration in Public History. Gary’s previous work sites have included the Maryland Historical Society, the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, the Monmouth County Historical Association, Freehold, NJ, and most recently as Director of the Siler House Museum in Lewisburg, PA. Gary is the author of numerous articles regarding local history published in Susquehanna Life and Mountain Home magazines. Gary is the compiler of a number of genealogical indices published by Genealogical Publishing Company. He is a graduate of Leadership Susquehanna Valley and the recipient of the Union County Historical Society Preservation Award for his preservation efforts of the alleged oldest house in Winfield, PA., the site of the Lee Massacre.
The Woman’s Club of Williamsport, Pennsylvania – 1925-1950

By John F. Piper, Jr.

The Woman’s Club of Williamsport, Pennsylvania observed its Silver Anniversary in 1950. It was an important occasion for it marked the arrival of the Club at a level of organization which promised a secure future. Twenty-five years may seem like a long time to reach such a level, but in the years since its founding it had experienced the greatest economic depression in the nation’s history, two floods which did substantial damage to its Club House, and World War II. The story of the Club in its first twenty-five years is one of able and determined leadership and a membership willing to face and overcome major challenges.

The women of Williamsport had been creating organizations and clubs at least as early as 1870, which was the year the women of the Methodist Episcopal churches of the city had organized the Woman’s Foreign Mission Society as a branch of the national Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In November 1872, women from seventeen Protestant churches had created the Woman’s Christian Association, changed its name to the Home for the Friendless in 1876, and opened the first orphanage and the first home for elderly women in the area. A number of women had organized the local branch of the Young Women’s Christian Association in 1893.1

These groups were followed by many others as women sought ways to further their interests. Beginning with the establishment of the Clio Club, named for the Greek muse of history, in 1897, they organized the following clubs by 1923: the Civic Club, the College Club, the Garden Club, and the Business and Professional Woman’s Club. These five clubs were doubtless very important to their members but they have left very few records of their activities with one major exception, those relating to a joint effort they launched in 1923 to see if they could secure a women’s club house where they could hold their regular meetings and special activities. Many members of these clubs joined the extensive discussions which led to the conclusion that they needed a new club which would own and run a club house. The culmination of their work was the Woman’s Club of Williamsport. The first Annual Meeting was January 3, 1925. The leaders of the new Club had planned for the event and had a Charter in hand, and a list of officers prepared to be elected and get to work. They anticipated a strong Club with a long future.

Foundations

The desire of the club women of Williamsport for a club house was not unusual. Club houses were and continue to be very important to club members, a place to meet and often share a meal, and a sign of permanence. The men of the community had organized the Ross Club in 1890, creating a common meeting place for men’s groups, but it did not admit women. The women’s groups had no club house and typically moved their meetings from place to place, as the number of members and activities changed. The Clio Club, as one example, held its organizational meeting in the Red Room of the Park Hotel. It later met in the Ball Room. Over the years it moved its meetings to spaces in the Trinity Episcopal Church Parish House, the Covenant Central Presbyterian Church, and the James V. Brown Library. Other women’s clubs had similar difficulty finding a permanent meeting place. The Civic Club had been seriously looking for one for over ten years. It is not clear what moved this need forward in 1923, but in early October the Civic Club decided to see if it could organize a joint effort “to secure a Woman’s Club House for Williamsport,” and invited the “Clio Club, Garden Club, College Club, and Business and Professional Woman’s Club to co-operate to the extent of appointing members to a committee who shall formulate plans for this purpose.” 2

The invitation met immediate and positive responses. Each club appointed three representatives to a Club House Committee, which met for the first time on November 23rd at the home of Anna Clapp Sprout (Mrs. C. E.) at the Berkshire on West 4th Street, now the Berkshire Manor. Those who gathered were: Frances R. Carson (Mrs. H. M.), Margaret Geddes Lundy (Mrs. Frederic K.), and Clara A. Reading (Mrs. John G.) for the Clio Club; Emily White Almy (Mrs. E. P.), Helen Peaslee (Mrs. Clarence), and Mary A. Haskin (Mrs. H. P.) for the Garden Club; Hellen Hubbell, Mary Graham (Mrs. James), and Dorothy Payne for the College Club; Ann Galbraith, Minnie Swartz, and Dr. Mary Cady for the Business and Professional Woman’s Club, and Marguerite Taylor, Louise Chatham (Mrs. N. C.), and Anna Sprout for the Civic Club. 3


2. Lucy O. Scott, Corresponding Secretary, to Mrs. H. F. W. Flock, President of the Garden Club, Oct. 3, 1923, Scrapbook. Oversized Storage. The Woman’s Club of Williamsport, PA, Manuscript Collection, The Lycoming County Historical Society Archives. Williamsport, PA. All citations are for documents in this Manuscript Collection unless otherwise noted.

The Club House Committee met five times between November and February, 1924, with the goal of working out a plan for a women’s club house which could be presented to the five clubs for their consideration. Fourteen of the fifteen members showed up at the organizational meeting and elected Louise Chatham, a founder and past president of the Civic Club, to be the chairman and Hellen Hubbell to serve as secretary. Chatham was an experienced musician and teacher who went to law school later in life. She became the first female attorney admitted to the Lycoming County Bar on January 14, 1924.

The Committee decided to keep its discussions confidential until it formulated a definite proposal. The Civic Club had called the meeting so it was not unexpected when a member of that club, Marguerite Taylor, introduced the first serious question, which was what kind of organization would own and operate the club house. She said her club had concluded that there were three possible options. First, a club house owned by one club and rented to the others. Second, a club house owned by a federation of clubs, each of which would be a department of the federation. Third, a club house owned and managed by an “association of women not limited to members of the five existing clubs.” Each option raised questions. If one club owned the house, might that club become “too autocratic?” The clubs had made it clear that they wished to retain their identity with their own budgets and programs. How, members of the Committee, asked, would a federation of the clubs work? Which club would manage the business affairs of the club house? Did this open up the possibility, as in option one, that one club or a management committee might become autocratic? 4

The third option, a new association of women, emerged as the one with the most promise.

The other main topic was acquiring a club house. Discussion turned on the related issues of raising money and obtaining a property. Taylor again took the lead. She felt the best way for the clubs to fund the project was to sell bonds. Someone noted that collectively the clubs had approximately 1,100 members, which suggested a good place to start. If each woman purchased a bond for $50, the initial funding would reach $55,000. A number of women belonged to more than one club but that did not seem to enter the calculation. The money raised, of women who worked so hard on this proposal expected already on the market. Most of them were in the West Fourth Street section of town, roughly in the area from Hepburn to Maynard Streets, where many of the women lived. 5

The Committee met at the home of Helen Peaslee on Maynard Street on December 3rd. Discussion began with the property issue and the merits of renting a property versus those of owning one. The decision was to present the clubs with a “definite plan of purchase.” 7 When the question rose about establishing a corporation Chatham spoke up and said that would involve costly taxes, news which ended discussion of creating a corporation to own the building. At the end of this meeting the Committee decided to ask each club to prepare “a carefully worked out plan for building and maintaining a Club House.”

Almost all the members of the Committee were present at the Peaslee home on December 13th, doubtless drawn by the possibility of reviewing the plans of the several clubs. The Clio, Civic, and Garden Clubs presented comprehensive plans. The Business and Professional Woman’s Club offered ideas about the purchase and maintenance of a club house based on the experience of the Elk’s Club. The College Club was, the Minutes reported without explanation, “afraid” to offer the Committee any definite plan. 8 The Committee focused on the three general plans, very likely following the outline of the one prepared by the Civic Club, which was by far the most detailed. The members discovered a wide range of agreement. The plans all proposed that the women organize a Woman’s Club for the purpose of providing “a club house for the women of Lycoming County.” 9 They all agreed that the clubs should hold a joint financial campaign, the Civic Club proposing a goal of $100,000. They also agreed to a dues structure in the $5 to $10 range annually. Income for the new club would come from the dues, rental to the clubs, and to other organizations and individuals. 10

The meeting held on February 4, 1924 was the Committee’s last and by far the most important. It reviewed a Club House Plan some of its members had prepared and decided to send it to the five clubs for action. The Plan proposed the clubs “organize and incorporate a ‘Woman’s Club,’” with the purpose of providing and maintaining a club house for the women of Williamsport. There would be three levels of membership: Charter Members at $1,000; Contributing Members at $100; and Life Members at $500. The clubs would run an “intensive drive for $100,000.” At the conclusion of a successful drive, and there was no hint that it might be anything but a success, the new club would apply for a charter. 11 At the end of the meeting the Club House Committee decided its work was done and dismissed itself.

No record has survived to indicate what response the women who worked so hard on this proposal expected

---

5. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
from their clubs. Some of them were likely disappointed when only two of the clubs endorsed it, the Civic and Garden Clubs. Available records do not identify the actions of individual clubs but indicate that one club did not think the timing was right to purchase a club house. Another decided, when faced with a decision, that it did not need a club house. A third declined to sign on to the project because it could not let go of its dream to have its own club house. The unexpected news was that the club that held onto its dream was not the Civic Club, which gave up its dream to support the new Plan. The three clubs which did not endorse the Plan offered no specific critiques of it. Indeed, a member of the Civic Club pointed out that no club nor any member of any club voiced any objection, nor did anyone offer an alternative proposal. After the responses were collected members of the Civic and Garden Clubs decided, despite the failure of the Plan to attract a majority of the clubs as organizations, that there existed a strong sentiment among the club women of Williamsport in support of the Plan. The two Clubs decided on a joint effort to implement it.

The decision of the two Clubs to move ahead marked the end of the beginning of the journey toward a women’s club house. In a few months the leaders of five important women’s clubs had worked through their differences and created a Plan for the future. That was major progress, more toward the goal of a club house for women than had ever been achieved. But the result of their joint effort was much more dramatic; it was the first step in the creation of a new organization, the Woman’s Club of Williamsport.

Civic and Garden Club leaders organized a small committee representing the two Clubs. It had eleven members, including seven who had served on the Club House Committee. Some of the members also belonged to clubs which had not officially joined this effort, which meant that clubs not part of this work nevertheless had contact with its progress. When the women gathered they elected Chatham to be their chairman and selected her office at 39 West Fourth Street to be their meeting place. This committee had a very specific purpose: locate a possible club house. Nameless in the records, it was in fact the club house search committee. It investigated a number of properties in what became increasingly clear was the target area: West Fourth Street near downtown.

Three months and many meetings later this committee settled on part of a property located on the east side of Walnut Street between West Fourth and West Edwin Streets. This land had a long history. It was about one-third of a much larger lot which Henry B. Smith had purchased in 1867. It had passed through the hands of Peter Herdic twice on its way to Moses Ulman in 1880. On it stood an imposing Second Empire home facing West Fourth Street which has continued in use, now known as the Smith-Ulman Mansion. What attracted the women to this land was the former carriage house, sometimes called a barn. It was a substantial two story brick building, 35 feet by 50 feet, on the West Edwin Street side of the property, with a walkway to Walnut Street and an entrance facing West Fourth Street, and a structure on the roof which served as ventilation for the barn. The women who found it believed it could be renovated into a club house. The property was owned by Fred. A. and Mabel I. Romich, who had purchased it from the Ulman family in 1923. The Romichs owned a furniture business about a block away on West Fourth Street and used the carriage house to store furniture. The women persuaded the Romichs to divide their property and sell them the part occupied by the carriage house for $11,000. They hired Carl Welker to develop a plan to renovate the building into a club house. When Welker’s design was ready the committee turned to their parent clubs for a final decision.

Mary Ames Haskin on the search committee took the lead. She had graduated from Williamsport Dickinson Seminary in 1901 and later from Women’s College of Baltimore City, now Goucher College, and had been very active in the Garden Club. She called the members of the executive boards of the Garden and Civic Clubs to her home on June 16th where the women received the report of the committee, which was to purchase the Romich carriage house. Part of the presentation included Welker’s plans to show how the building might be transformed into a club house. The members of the executive boards were excited by the proposal and agreed to call together their respective clubs for final action.

Anticipating success of their efforts they made several other decisions. They appointed a joint purchasing committee, which included Scott, Swartz, Peaslee, and Mabel Harer, and charged it, subject to a final vote of the clubs, to proceed to purchase the property at the best possible price with occupancy by August 1st. They accepted the offer of Scott “to furnish the necessary
cash to buy the property on behalf of the executive committees of the Garden and Civic Clubs.”14 They also appointed a committee of six to choose the group which would formally organize the new club. They chose Chatham, Sprout, and Mary Hunt (Mrs. Charles W.) for the Civic Club, and Haskin, Lundy, and Sara Deemer (Mrs. William R.) for the Garden Club, and charged them “to select names for the executive committee for the organization of a woman’s club.”15 The boards agreed that this organizational committee should be called the Club House Executive Committee and that the committee of six should approach at least twenty-five “representative women,” without regard to their club affiliations. The Executive Committee would “assume control of the club house project, the building, furnishing, financing and the organization of the Woman’s Club.”16 When the six women completed their work the Civic and Garden Clubs agreed to “withdraw from control of the proposed Woman’s Club, and headquarters will be established and made available for all women’s organizations.”17

The Civic Club met the very next day and voted unanimously in favor of the search committee report. The Garden Club met the following day and concurred. The purchase committee wasted no time. Scott met with Romich on June 19th. They signed a formal document before a notary in which Romich agreed “to sell to the Woman’s Club of Williamsport the property at the southeast corner of Walnut Street and Edwin Street …” for the sum of $11,000, $500 due immediately and the rest to be paid on October 1, 1924, without interest on the deferred payment. He was free to use the property until the Woman’s Club began renovations. In addition, he agreed to rent the Club a long narrow piece of land, essentially a walkway, from the north entrance of the carriage house to West Fourth Street, for $1 a year, and to sell the Club furnishings at cost. This agreement was the first time the name “Woman’s Club of Williamsport” appeared in any official document.18

The selection committee worked very diligently and within two weeks met in Chatham’s office to review a preliminary list of over thirty women who would be the organizers of the new club. At the end of the month the committee reconvened with the final list of those who had agreed to serve on the Executive Committee, carefully including a separate list of those who had been contacted but who were not able to accept. No reason appears in the Minutes for this second list, but it may have been that the committee wanted to make clear to all involved that they had reached out to many of the leading club women in the community and some had been contacted and declined to serve. Many prominent persons joined the effort, including Henrietta Lyon, who had been one of the founders of the YWCA over thirty years earlier and had helped organize the Community Chest in 1922, and Anne Perley, who was in the midst of a very long and successful term as President of the Board of the Home for the Friendless. Almost half the members lived on West Fourth Street, one listing the Park Hotel as her address. The club house was in their neighborhood.19 The remarkable energy and successes of the small committees from the two Clubs, from securing a building for a club house to selecting the committee which would move the Club House Plan forward, became the second step in the process of creating a new club.

The Birth of the Woman’s Club

The Executive Committee of the Woman’s Club House met for the first time on August 14th in Chatham’s office. Although the title of the Committee carried forward the initial motivating idea of a club house, it was clear to all who gathered as noted often in the Minutes, that this group had been formed for the purpose of creating a Woman’s Club of Williamsport which would own the club house. Chatham served as temporary chair and invited nominations for officers. The Committee elected Margaret Lundy to serve as Chairman and Marguerite Taylor to be Secretary. Lundy was a graduate of Mount Holyoke College and an active community volunteer. The decisions of the Executive Committee as it discussed and then approved the many reports of its subordinate committees constituted the third and final step in the creation of the Woman’s Club.

Lundy took charge. She listed five committees that needed to be organized to complete a variety of specific tasks to establish the new club. The Executive Committee concurred and selected the leaders of the committees. The Campaign Committee would develop a plan to raise funds and secure members under the direction of Helen Rewalt (Mrs. Robert K.); the Building Committee would “secure plans and contracts for the work necessary in fitting up the newly purchased building”, under the leadership of Louise Chatham; the Organization Committee would work on the charter and by-laws of the new club and would be led by Frances Carson; the Publicity Committee was in charge of press notices and would be chaired by Marguerite Taylor; the Furnishing Committee would secure the furniture and fixtures for the building to make it ready for use under the guiding hands of Mary Haskin. The chairs of these committees received authority to select their own members and proceed with their work in consultation with Lundy and Taylor.20

The Building Committee had the difficult task of planning for the renovation of the club house. Chatham welcomed Mary Smith Wilson (Mrs. J. Dale) and Minnie

---

14. Executive Boards, Garden and Civic Clubs, Minutes, June 16, 1924. Folder: Minutes, Organizational (June-October, 1924).
15. Ibid.
16. “Club House”.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid. See also “THIS AGREEMENT” June 19, 1924. Folder: Legal Documents-Deeds.
Swartz to join her. This group met with Carl Welker and offered him the opportunity to draw the final plans and then supervise the operations. He agreed to do both at 5% of the price of the renovations, not to exceed $300, and to defer any payment until after the financial campaign. The original proposals were modified during the several meetings with the committee, which resulted in the following plan: the first floor to include an entrance hall leading to an auditorium which would be 42 x 45 feet, large enough to seat 175-200 people, and a toilet and a lounge, the latter separated from the auditorium by accordion doors to make possible an even larger space; the second floor to include a large tea room which could also accommodate 175-200 people at tables, and a toilet, a kitchen, a serving room, an office, a sun parlor, and a room with a bath. This was an ambitious transformation of the original space. The Executive Committee approved this plan on September 16th and gave the Building Committee the authority to move forward with minor modifications. Welker agreed to prepare a water color sketch of the new exterior of the building which could be used in the fund raising campaign.21

The date the Building Committee and Welker agreed to for the completion of the plans was October 3rd. The records do not give a specific reason for the date but everyone involved knew that the final purchase of the building was scheduled for October 1st. That event took place on time. Acting as the agent of the Woman’s Club Lucy Scott secured a loan of $11,000 from the West Branch National Bank on September 30. The note was endorsed by five men, all spouses of leading members of the Executive Committee: N. C. Chatham, C. L. Peaslee, C. E. Sprout, H. P. Haskin, and F. K. Lundy. On October 1st Scott paid the Romichs $10,500, the balance due on the sales agreement, and the Woman’s Club became the owner of the club house. Unfortunately, Welker was not so timely. The women became very frustrated by his constant delays. They could not ask contractors for bids until they had the plans, and Welker did not deliver them until mid-November, more than six weeks after he promised them. Once they arrived the Building Committee quickly invited four builders to bid on the project and two responded: Jacob Gehron Co., Inc., and W. H. C. Huffman and Sons. Gehron’s bid was the low one, $15,954, and the Executive Committee accepted it.22 This began a very long relationship between the Woman’s Club and the Gehron Company which lasted until that Company went out of business near the end of the century.

Helen Rewalt organized the Campaign Committee, renamed the Finance Committee, and asked Henrietta Lyon, Margaret Wilson, Lillian Hyman, and Catherine Decker (Mrs. P. H.) to serve on it. Their work became the focus of the Executive Committee meeting on September 16th. After extensive discussion the Executive Committee agreed to hold a financial campaign which would focus on “securing subscriptions and selling bonds to supplement the sums given outright,” and that those who contributed would be given five months to pay their pledges. These were important decisions, but the discussion had left so many unanswered questions that the Executive Committee deferred a decision on a final campaign plan until Rewalt’s committee could find answers to them, and prepare a list of “prospective subscribers.”23

The Finance Committee turned to attorney Oliver J. Decker for help and submitted their questions to him. He had experience with local men’s clubs and he responded with a long and detailed letter. One of the questions the Committee faced had risen early in the conversation about a club house, and that was should the new organization be incorporated and pay the taxes associated with that status. Decker said the new club should incorporate and accept the taxes, which he did not think would be onerous. Without incorporation, he said, any individual associated with the club would be liable for its debts. Moreover, if the members failed to raise all the money needed to start the club, banks would be very unlikely to loan money to a group of individuals. Another question was about the best way to raise money. The Executive Committee had tentatively decided to ask people for subscriptions, which meant outright donations, and to supplement that effort with the sale of stock. Decker took a very firm position in favor of the sale of stock. He told them that in his experience raising funds by subscription was difficult enough for churches and colleges, and they were asking for money for a club. They should sell stock, and he agreed with their price of $50 a share. People want something tangible for their money, he said, and a share of stock, even if the buyers knew it was in fact a donation, gave them a sense of ownership. If the organization failed and had to liquidate its property, stockholders could expect some final return on their investment.

Several of the questions were about levels of membership and the variable cost of a share of stock.

23. “The following members.”
Decker proposed one level of full membership. To belong to the club a person should have one share of stock at its full price. If someone wanted to contribute a larger amount of money then she could purchase, for example, ten shares for $500. This would give her 10 votes at the annual meeting, but the membership would be large enough that it was highly unlikely that any one person could control an election. If the club wished to have a lower level of membership, such as associate members, then charge them $10 but without vote on the affairs of the club. It was very unwise, he counselled, to sell full memberships at any discount, or to give away memberships to persons who might not have enough cash for one. The Club was not, he said, “starting a charitable organization but a worldly club.” He offered further assistance, without charge, including help in obtaining a charter.

The Executive Committee met on October 2nd. Scott had secured the club house with the final payment the day before. Property in hand the Committee needed to resolve the financial questions and raise funds. Rewalt read Decker’s letter to the group. The Executive Committee was very impressed with the attorney’s arguments. It rescinded its previous decision to raise funds primarily through a subscription campaign and voted “to incorporate as ‘THE WOMAN’S CLUB’, with a stock holding and associate membership.” It also voted that the Chairman of the Finance Committee launch the fund raising campaign. Rewalt moved quickly and within two months her committee raised $16,500 through the sale of stock. Margaret Lundy purchased the first shares, Louise Chatham the second, and Mary Haskin the third, which was very appropriate since these were three of the key women in the formation of the new club. Work proceeded on a charter under the guidance of Attorney Decker.

As the several subordinate committees drew their work to a close the Executive Committee called a final meeting for December 1st. It convened in the auditorium of the James V. Brown Library. It was identified as “The Organization Meeting of the Woman’s Club of Williamsport, Pa.” Its purposes were to accept “the Charter granted by the Court of Common Pleas of Lycoming County and to elect officers to serve until the first annual meeting.” Attorney Decker was present and accepted the invitation to read the Charter. The purpose of the Club, identified as a Corporation, was for “promoting social intercourse among its members and the acquiring and holding of real estate, for the establishment and maintenance of a club house or building for the convenience and enjoyment of its members and also the convenience and enjoyment of other women’s clubs or organizations, to whom the privileges of the said Club or Club House may be extended”.

The Charter identified 28 stockholders, all women and almost all of them members of the Committee, who owned 95 shares of stock. There has never been a male stockholder. They were given authority “to enact By-Laws, impose annual dues, regulate the admission, suspension and expulsion of members to and from the privileges of the Club, provide for the extension to non-stockholders and non-members of the privileges of the Club and to impose the conditions under which the same may be exercised and fix classes of membership and regulate the privileges to be enjoyed by each class”.

Twenty-six women signed the Charter on October 29th, using their given names. The Certificate of Incorporation was entered into the records of the Recorder’s Office on November 24th. Margaret Lundy made the motion to accept the Charter and the Committee voted unanimously for it. It also adopted a seal, which featured two circles. The words “Woman’s Club of Williamsport, Pa.” were in the outside circle and the phrase “Incorporated 1924” was in the inside one. The Club continues to use the seal. The Committee also accepted a sample stock certificate which Attorney Decker had brought with him. Stock certificates remain part of the admissions process, similar to but not identical with the original ones.

The Committee elected officers, their titles and the number of offices temporary, who would serve until the first annual meeting. The stockholders had as many votes as they had shares of stock. Lundy and Chatham were nominated for President, their nominations doubtless a sign of support for their leadership during the previous year. Chatham decided to withdraw, and the Committee elected Lundy by unanimous vote. Chatham became First Vice-President, Perley Second Vice-President, and Rewalt Third Vice-President. The Committee elected Deemer Secretary and Haskin Treasurer. Lundy spoke at the end of the meeting, encouraging members to increase their efforts to sell more shares. The Committee gave a rising vote of thanks to the Civic and Garden Clubs for their efforts, fully aware that the initiative of the members of those Clubs was responsible for fulfilling the dream of a woman’s club house.

The First Year

The Woman’s Club originated in the desire of the club women of Williamsport to obtain and sustain a club house for the use of their several clubs. It became increasingly clear well before the first officers were elected that to accomplish this they needed to create a sixth women’s club, which is what they did when they convened in the parlors of the Y. W. C. A. on the afternoon of January 3, 1925, for the first Annual Meeting of the new Club. Although much of the work of organizing the Club had taken place in 1924, the Club dates its existence from this
January meeting. First and foremost was the election of officers. Anna Whitehead (Mrs. Harvey W.) chaired the Nominating Committee which had decided to present those who had been elected as interim office holders at the December meeting to be the first officers of the new Club. There were no nominations from the floor. Election Judges distributed ballots and the votes were collected and tabulated. There were 137 votes cast for each of the major officers and all were elected without a dissenting vote. The interim period was over; Margaret Lundy, a member of the Garden and Clio Clubs, became the first President and Louise Chatham of the Civic Club served as the initial First Vice-President.28

Carson presented the proposed By-Laws on behalf of the Organization Committee. The articles defined the organization of the Club, and established its major procedures. Article II listed five classes of members: Life; Charter; Active; Associate; and Non-resident. Life members were those who owned ten shares of stock; Charter members were those who purchased stock on or before January 3, 1925; Active members were those who owned at least one share of stock. The stock price was set at $50 and the dues at $10. Associate members paid an entrance fee, $15, and annual dues of $5. Non-resident status was available to those who lived more than ten miles from Williamsport. Members of the Club could propose one person for membership per year, and had to find two members who were acquainted with the candidate to endorse her. Article V vested the business of the Club in a Board of Governors, which consisted of a President, three Vice-Presidents, a Secretary, a Treasurer, Directors, and the chairs of three committees: House, Admissions, and Finance. The House Committee was in charge of the Club House, and had authority to establish and enforce all Club Rules, subject to the approval of the Board of Governors. The Treasurer presented the final report at this meeting, indicating a balance of $1,468, and a note to the West Branch National Bank of $6,000.29

The pressing issue was to get the club house ready for occupancy, which meant renovating the carriage house and furnishing it. The committees were already in place to carry out both tasks. Louise Chatham, although just elected a vice president, carried on as Chairman of the Building Committee. Her committee, in constant contact with President Lundy, signed formal contracts with Welker and the Gehron Company. Once Gehron was under way the committee requested bids for a wide variety of work that needed to be done to complete the house, including heating, plumbing, electrical wiring, and interior and exterior painting. The heating plant was the most expensive item of the special contracts. A. B. Hunt and Company, W. E. Chambers, E. Keeler and Company, and Durbin Chestnut submitted bids. The committee went over the proposals in great detail and decided to offer the contract to Durbin Chestnut. They subsequently also hired him to install the hot water system. His final bill was $2,525. The committee received four bids for plumbing. Two of them, A. B. Hunt and Company and W. T. Reed, were almost identical. The committee favored Hunt but his bid was not the lowest, so it decided to approach him and see if he would drop his bid $20 in order to become the lowest bidder. He agreed to what was surely a secret arrangement and the committee rewarded him with the contract. It is not clear how common this negotiating practice was in a bidding process but the committee repeated it when it came time to decide which firm to select for the electrical work. Prior and Sallada was $100 more than the lowest bidder. The committee “consulted confidentially” and told a representative of the company that if it submitted a revised bid $100 lower than its first one it would receive the contract. The company agreed and was rewarded.30

The subordinate contracts were important but the Building Committee spent most of its time consulting with Gehron. As soon as Welker’s plans became available, well before the Woman’s Club formally organized, there were many suggestions for changes. Some were incorporated in the contract with Gehron, but as soon as hammer hit nail more suggestions for changes emerged. Gehron provided prices for a closet in the bedroom, a larger medicine cabinet, and enclosing the electrical wires. To save money the committee eliminated the dresser in the bedroom closet, but they had to add shelves above the casement windows, and six inch sills for the windows. Other additions included screens for the windows, constructing the terrace, removing the cesspool, and repairing the sidewalks to Walnut and West Fourth Streets. The last item was under orders from the City. The Club did not have to pay for the flagstones for the West Fourth Street walk because they were a gift from the First Presbyterian Church which was in the process of replacing a walk. Gehron’s final bill was about $1,200 more than the original contract: $17,127. The final cost of the club house was $24,618. At the close of their final report, Chatham and Swartz thanked those who had been the most helpful to them: the Gehron Company, Durbin Chestnut, and the Prior and Sallada Company.31

The Furnishing Committee, led by Mary Haskin with substantial assistance from President Lundy, carried on much of its work in the spring and summer of 1925, locating and purchasing items for the club house. Working with a limited budget the committee tried “to make the Club-house reminiscent of the long ago,” with a careful mix of antiques and reproductions. The ship lanterns in the lounge, hall and outside entrance doors were originals from old

31. Ibid.
sailing vessels purchased from a businessman in Philadelphia. The committee placed in the lounge a Pennsylvania Dutch corner cupboard with original latches which it had found in Carlisle. The drop-leaf tables in the dining room were old, as were the painted chairs. Many members gave gifts of furniture and pictures, apparently only after the items were considered appropriate by the committee. Other members loaned items, including a copper kettle, an heirloom in Mary Streibeigh’s family, and a silver service owned by Lundy. The most expensive item was the china for the dining room, $513. The initial furnishings cost $5,566. Replacing worn out furnishings, adding new items, some bought and some borrowed, became a continuing challenge for the Club.32

The first meeting of the Woman’s Club in its finished Club House was a Special Meeting of the Stockholders on September 8, 1925. The contractors had completed their work and presented their bills. Most of the furnishings were in place. The pressing business of the Club was to pay its creditors, and the amount the Club needed was $20,000 more than it had. The Club voted to borrow $20,000 from the West Branch National Bank, the same bank it had borrowed from to purchase the building, $16,000 in the form of a mortgage on the property at the rate of 6% per year, payable semi-annually, and $4,000 in the form of a note at the rate of 6%, payable in four months, but renewable as negotiated between the bank and the Club. The vote was unanimous. It also hired an Executive Secretary, Miss A. Harriet Woodward, and paid her $75 a month and room and board to manage the Club House.33 The Club replaced her with Fanny Adams (Mrs. Charles M.) in 1926.

When the Club met for its second Annual Meeting in January, 1926, its first in the Club House, it was well underway. Committee reports included one from the Finance Committee which explained “the plan of financing and managing the club,” doubtless the decision of the stockholders the previous September. The Treasurer reported income of $48,648 and expenditures of $47,234 from the inception of the Club to December 1, 1925. The House Committee had been very active since September launching the first programs, and the Membership Committee had worked hard to secure new members. Before it held its annual election, the Club acted to clarify an issue about those eligible for offices. All the first year officers had been interim or temporary, serving during December, 1924. If that service were counted then none of them would be eligible for re-election in 1926 because they would have served more than one year. The Club voted that those who had served in a temporary capacity were eligible for one more year of service. The Club re-elected the first year officers, replacing only the Third Vice-President Rewalt with Louise Brown (Mrs. S. Van).34

Organizing the Club

Leadership had been the key to organizing the Club and was crucial to its future success. It was not surprising that the first six presidents were Charter members, two of them Life members. Three of them had served on the Executive Committee and another had been asked to serve but declined. Margaret Lundy was succeeded by Louise Munson, 1927-1929, who was followed by Mary Haskin, 1929-1931; Sara Deemer, 1931-1933; and Esther McCormick (Mrs. Seth Jr.), 1933-1935. In 1935 the Club turned to Margaret Lundy for a second time and she became the first person to serve more than two one-year terms as president. She was very moved by her election and told the Club members that she felt “honored.” 35

When Lundy left office in 1937 her departure marked a change in presidential leadership from those who had been involved in founding the Club to those who joined later. Only two of the next eight presidents were Charter members. However, Charter members continued to be in major leadership positions. On the occasion of the Silver Anniversary all the major officers were Charter members but the president. Two of the key committees, Finance and Program, were also chaired by Charter members. Charter members were just one-third of the Club membership, and their continued election to major roles suggests an evolutionary shift in leadership. The Club held fast to the length of terms of offices, modifying it only once, in 1929, when it made immediate re-election to the offices of Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer possible.36 One important discussion during the organizational meetings had been the strong desire to avoid any kind of autocracy, by individual leaders or any one of the clubs. The decision to rotate officers after two one year terms was doubtless a result of that concern. Not in its first twenty-five years and never since has the Club been identified with one of the original clubs or with the leadership of any particular person, an accomplishment that can be attributed to its high quality of leadership and sound principles of organization.

The Club issued its first major publication, the Manual, in February, 1926. It was an effort to ensure that all the members, and others who might enquire, could better understand the Club. It included lists of officers and members, the Charter, By-Laws, and House

Rules, including a section on Tariffs, listing the charges for using the club house. It did not publish a manual every year. It does not appear that the Club ever had a newsletter, perhaps because in its early years the local newspapers gave it extensive coverage. In 1937-1938 it began to publish a Calendar, separate from the Manual, identifying by date and title the various programs for the year, the kinds of information that might have been communicated in a newsletter. This became a small booklet beginning in 1939, with similar booklets during the war years, at least one of them with a patriotic design on the cover. In 1944 the Club published its seventh Manual, which included the items in previous manuals and a calendar of activities for the year. The Club gave its major publication a new name in its Silver Anniversary year: Year Book of the Woman’s Club. The name has survived to the present. The most recent edition does not include the Charter and By-Laws, but has a version of the house rules, currently called “The Woman’s Club Policies,” and a section titled: “Programs.”

The two foundation documents are the Charter and the By-Laws. The Charter served the Club well in its first quarter century, despite changes in the social and economic life of the community. The Club made only two significant changes, both in 1938. In Section 2, the statement of purpose of the organization, the Club replaced the general statement, “promoting social intercourse among its members,” with the more specific “for educational and civic purposes.” This signaled a more cultural and less social purpose for the Club as it looked forward. It dropped Section 8 which specified a date for the annual meeting and the list of officers because it was considering a more flexible calendar.

In contrast to the Charter, the By-Laws were the focus of constant debate, and came before the Board of Governors at virtually every annual meeting. That was not unusual because the By-Laws, as distinct from the Charter, were about the organization of the Club, which evolved over time. The By-Law, section which attracted the most attention was Article II on Membership. The discussions were not on how to adjust the By-Laws to attract more members but on one specific aspect of membership: the appropriate age for a young woman to become a full member. Nothing about this appeared in the initial By-Laws. At the second Annual Meeting the Club added a Section 7 to Article II: “No girl under 20 years of age shall be eligible for membership.” In 1932 the Club removed Section 7 and added the following: “Any young woman under 25 years of age shall be eligible to be a Junior member and shall have all the privileges of the club, but shall not be entitled to vote nor to hold office.” “Junior” member became a new membership category. Five years later this Section became: “Any young woman 35 years of age or under shall be eligible to be a Junior member, and shall have all privileges of the club, but unless a stock holder shall not be entitled to hold offices of President, Vice President, or Treasurer.” This was an important change because for the first time non-stockholders could hold some offices. This section disappeared by 1947. In 1938 a Section 8 introduced a new idea: “Unmarried girls under twenty years of age may have the privilege of the Club House on their mothers’ memberships.” Subsequently renumbered Section 7, this remained in the By-Laws in 1950. The Minutes offer no rationales for any of these changes.

Substantive changes in Article V about Officers were made several times before 1950. In addition to the change permitting the Treasurer and the Assistant Treasurer to succeed themselves, the Club decided in 1931 to authorize the Chairman of the Finance Committee to serve ex officio on any committee which made expenditures. This made her part of every financial decision of the Club, authority not far removed from that of the president. These changes were made as the economic depression deepened and may have been the result of a sense that expenses needed closer attention.

What became a significant change surfaced at a special meeting of Stockholders and Associate members in January, 1936. The issue was the possibility of making the Club a “Departmental Club.” The departments would be in addition to the committee structure. The Club found the idea attractive and quickly adopted it. A new Section of the By-Laws identified the following departments: Garden, Fine Arts, and Home and Citizenship, and authorized additional ones as new interests emerged. By 1950 Home and Citizenship had become Citizenship and Welfare, and there were four new departments: Legislative; Publicity; Personnel; and Policy. The best explanation for this action is in a summary of the discussions that said the decision was “the natural foundation for a planned program for a year’s work.” Departments were responsible for programming and it was surely no accident that the very next year the Club published its first program calendar. A change in the Club which appeared in neither the Charter nor By-Laws occurred in February, 1936 when it decided to become a member of the Pennsylvania Federation of Women’s Clubs.

Programming was a key to the Club’s future as a social and economic institution. The Club realized almost as soon as it opened the Club House that taking care of the property by renting it to others did not provide a very substantial basis for the organization. It was a new club,

42. The Woman’s Club of Williamsport, Pa., 1938.
the only women’s club with a Club House, and had to figure out ways to make it attractive to others and produce an income to pay the bills. In the summer of 1925 the Club decided to use the kitchen and the availability of meals as part of its program strategy. It hired Charles Majors as the Steward and his wife Wilhelmina as the cook. They lived nearby on Locust Street and were part of the Negro community. They provided a high quality of service and the Club retained them for many years. Charles died in 1946 after twenty years of service as Steward. Wilhelmina continued as cook for several more years.

During its early years the Club opened its Club House from 10 a.m. until 10 p.m. every day. The Club, the other women’s clubs and myriad other groups used the Club House so often that the Club frequently needed to supplement its staff, and often hired Annie Boyd to cater some of the luncheons. “Meals,” said one report, “were served on Sundays and tea or a light lunch could be procured without advance notice.”47 The House Committee reported at the second Annual Meeting, the first after the Club House opened, that the Club had served 718 meals in less than four months and was open to suggestions about how to proceed.48 Almost immediately after the House Committee report someone moved and the Club voted that “the Woman’s Club will strictly observe the Volstead Act.”49 Food was an important way to the future; drink was not, at least not alcohol. There is no record of what the Club did when Congress repealed that Act in 1933.

The leaders of the Club realized, of course, that members and potential new ones were more interested in substantive programs than in the availability of food. Programs specific to the Club were not identified in any of the early publications and only occasionally reported at the annual meetings. Events included lectures, luncheons and teas associated with various kinds of meetings, and bridge parties and tournaments. At the Annual Meeting held in January 1937, the Club decided to organize its program and create an annual calendar.50 The impetus for this may have come from the Pennsylvania Federation of Women’s Clubs, since it happened the year after the Club joined the Federation, or from an internal desire to become more intentional about its programs. At the same time it shifted its schedule so that new officers served from July until June.

The Club organized its new program calendar from September 1937 through May 1938, with an average of more than two meetings a month. The first event was on September 9, an Opening Day Tea, featuring music and a flower show organized by the Garden Department. Two weeks later the Club held a luncheon followed by a Fashion Show sponsored by Brozman’s, a local women’s clothing store. One meeting in October was a lecture on “International Relations,” by Bucknell University Professor William G. Owens, and another was a luncheon followed by a book review. In November the Club held a special luncheon for Junior Members and Guests, very likely a membership recruiting event. The December calendar featured a luncheon at which the State Federation’s Chairman of Legislation, Mrs. John Crist, spoke about “Grist from the Legislative Mill,” and the annual Christmas Feast. In the spring there was a luncheon at the Annual Meeting, five book review luncheons, four lectures, an Arbor Day planting of three dogwood trees on the Club House grounds in honor of several early Club leaders, including Margaret Lundy and Louise Chatham, and a Garden Pilgrimage to local gardens.

All these events were the smaller part of the year’s activities. The Entertainment Committee scheduled “Bridge Luncheons, Tournaments and Games” throughout the year. The Board of Governors met the third Thursday of every month and various committees and departments held meetings. Many clubs met once or twice monthly: the Clio Club met on the first and third Wednesdays; the College Club on the fourth Tuesday; the Civic Club on a regular basis; and the Woman’s Auxiliary to the Lycoming County Medical Society on the second Friday. The Club hosted the Lycoming County Federation of Women’s Clubs at least annually. Not all the groups were exclusively for women. The Club hosted a Regional Red Cross meeting, and the business meetings of the Lycoming County Historical Society.51 The Club House was a very busy place.

Once begun, this careful program planning became an integral part of the Club’s life, which continued through 1950, and in the years since. A President’s Tea in September, lectures, travelogues, music programs, book reviews, bridge luncheons and tournaments, and the Christmas Feast became part of the program every year through the Silver Anniversary. On occasion the Fine Arts Department would present a play. The topics of the lectures varied widely but almost every year there was at least one on interior design or decoration and another on some aspect of gardening. Many of the lectures were on local issues, like the one presented by Howard Keefer, Executive Secretary of the Williamsport Community Chest in October, 1939, on the expansion of its program, or the one given by William C. Phillips, the County Supervisor of Public Assistance in November, 1940, on “Who’s Who in Relief?”52

The only alteration in this programming came after the beginning of World War II. The Club decided at its Annual Meeting in January, 1942, when the nation was still reeling from Pearl Harbor, to cancel

49. Ibid.
some of the meetings planned for the spring and to form a Committee on Defense which would “launch a comprehensive defense program for the Woman’s Club.”53 “Comprehensive” is a strong word, but new topics appeared in the lectures, including one in May, 1942 titled “Gardening in Wartime,” and another in the fall of that year by John E. Person, editor of the Sun-Gazette, titled “The News and National Defense.”54 The Club contributed 1,186 hours sewing for the Red Cross at meetings at the Club House in 1942, and raised $200 for that organization at a white elephant sale in 1943. It also sold War Bonds.55 It opened its book reviews to young men and women who were involved in technical training at the Williamsport Technical Institute.56

The Club returned to its traditional programming in the post-war years. During the Silver Anniversary the feature event was an anniversary dinner planned by Jeannette Heether (Mrs. Edward P.) and Annabelle Ridall (Mrs. Paul L.) The programs the rest of the year were not attached to the celebration. The Rev. E. Raymond Shaheen, a Lutheran pastor, presented an illustrated lecture on “Europe”; a representative of Elizabeth Arden spoke on “All Women Are Beautiful”; Dr. and Mrs. Ridall presented an illustrated travelogue of Newfoundland, Labrador and Nova Scotia; Mrs. Olga Gordon, Fashion Coordinator of Wanamaker’s Store, spoke on “Interior Decorating”; a Valentine Tea featured special music. The Club also held a 4-H Club Party. Helen Weidman, on the faculty of Williamsport Dickinson Seminary and Junior College, addressed the County Federation of Women’s Clubs. There were several additional lectures and seventeen bridge parties.57 The Club had achieved a balance of cultural activities, community events, and entertainment.

**Major Challenges**

The Club organized in a relatively peaceful time, which soon gave way to some of the most difficult years in the nation’s history. Almost from its beginning and certainly after the start of the depression the Club faced two persistent challenges: maintaining its membership and securing financial stability.

When the women gathered to organize the new club they counted over 1,100 potential members, but they did not know until they began to sell stock how many of those would choose to join, since it was to be an additional club, not one to replace any of the others. A strong Membership Committee signed up 273 persons the first year, almost all of them Charter members, including nine Life members and two club Life members, Clio and Civic. The next year membership soared to 403, a total which included 116 Associate members.58 In 1927 total membership reached 465, including 181 Associate members. That year the Membership Committee segued into the Admissions Committee and subsequent membership reports were made by that committee. As the economy changed in 1929 the number of new members began to decrease and fell to 402 by 1930, encouraging President Haskin to call for each member to recruit one more member, in order she said, to increase the value of the stock.59 Membership plunged to 310 by the end of 1932. The drop led the Club to develop a membership drive which included the possibility of postponing the payment of the entry fee to a date determined by the Admissions Committee. Continued slippage led to an incentive program which gave a $3.00 credit to those who recruited new members, a program repeated for several years.60 None of the incentive campaigns reached their goals.

The best news was the economic recovery which began in 1938. In that year the Club attracted a significant number of new members, some of them women “who had dropped out during the depression.” This continued to happen the following year which recorded a startling increase of 51.61 Membership climbed to over 300 and remained at that level until 1942 when it fell to 242, doubtless a consequence of the war, which led to another campaign for new members.62 Such efforts had accomplished little during the depression and had modest results during the war. Membership rose after the war reaching almost 300 by the summer of 1948, only to drop back in the following two years. There were 271 members during the Silver Anniversary year, almost the number of the first year.63

There is no evidence that anyone ever tried to calculate the optimum size for the Woman’s Club, the number of members required to maintain its programs and budget. Despite many fluctuations in membership during some of the most difficult years in the nation’s history it reached its Silver Anniversary holding its own and could anticipate a good future. However, Club members had learned that maintaining the membership would be a continuing major challenge.

Achieving and maintaining financial stability was the other major challenge for the Club. The members were aware of the great importance of the finances and put this part of their work in very trusted hands. The first Treasurer was Mary Haskin and the first chairman of the Finance Committee was Henrietta Lyon. The Club
elected Lucy Scott the first Assistant Treasurer. These persons were all deeply involved in creating the Club and were all Charter members. Haskin stepped away as the primary person in financial affairs in 1927 to become First Vice-President and remained away during her tenure as President. When she left that post in 1931 she became the Chairman of the Finance Committee, and Beatrice Burns became Treasurer. Haskin, Burns, and Scott worked together on the finances of the Club for over a decade and Haskin and Scott remained in their offices when the Silver Anniversary arrived. This continuity was crucial to the financial health of the Club.

The major initial sources of funds were the sale of stock, dues, rentals, and income from the food service, often reported as “Dining Room”. Haskin presented a detailed financial report in November, 1926. The initial sale of stock, which began in the fall of 1924, produced $21,765, by far the largest single source of money at the time and throughout the future. Never again were so many shares of stock sold at one time. Income during the first year of operation included dues, $7,058, the dining room, $9,228, and rentals, $688.64 The funds from the sale of stock paid for the purchase of the building and helped pay for the renovations and furnishings. Property ownership made it possible to borrow the $20,000 needed to complete the payments due. The Club began with a Club House and a debt. The largest single expense the first year was the dining room, which totaled over $8,100. Other major expenses included taxes, building repairs, some furnishings, and interest payments on the mortgage and a loan.65

This report set the pattern for the next twenty-five years. There was some sale of stock every year, but it fluctuated as the number of new members waxed and waned. During the depression and the war there were years when this produced very little income. One possibility was to increase the cost of the stock, but the few times the issue was mentioned it failed to gain traction. Another possibility was to market Life memberships, but that did not happen either. Attorney Decker had told those organizing the Club that he did not think there would be many Life members, surely too few to influence a vote. He was right. The Minutes reference the sale of Life memberships only twice in these years, one in 1938 and another in 1939.66 They were an important boost to income but there is no evidence that they were solicited, and surely if there had been others they would have been mentioned in the records. Not only did the stock price not rise, neither did the Entrance Fee; it was $15 in 1925 and in 1950. The Club did raise its dues, from the initial $10 to $23 and that helped cover increased expenses.67

The overall financial picture was very close budgeting, especially after the decline of membership in the early 1930s. Detailed budgets were remarkably similar from year to year. The budget for 1932 projected expenses of $8,476, of which $2,391 was the cost of food, and anticipated income of $8,493, for a surplus of $16.68 In 1938 the budget was based on expenses of $7,223, including $2,230 for food against hoped for income of $7,305, leaving a potential surplus of $81.69 In the midst of the war the budget for 1944 for expenses was $8,567 against an income of $8,583, leaving a very narrow balance of $16.70 Post-war budgets looked remarkably similar. The one for 1948 showed a substantial loss due to a charge for depreciation. On the occasions that there was a larger than expected surplus it was applied to the debt. The early decision of the Club to initiate a food service was very important for its programming and helpful to its budget; however, after the decline in membership the food service, including not just the cost of the food but dining room supplies and the waiters often left a very narrow window of profit.

On occasion the Club faced some additional expenses. In its initial year it received a tax bill which the officers did not think it should pay because of the Club’s non-profit status. Lucy Scott communicated with the office of the Auditor General of Pennsylvania and after several exchanges the State cancelled the tax.71 The Club did incur some taxes because it had employees and a food service and they became part of the normal Club expenses. In 1929 the Club decided to make renovations to the Club House. The number of groups using the food service and the increasing number of people being served had put great strains on the kitchen and its equipment. The Club voted to remove a partition to make the kitchen larger, and install “a larger new stove, an electrolux, a plate warmer, steel tables for serving, a cook’s sink and a divided sink for washing dishes.” In addition, the Club had the floors refinished, bought new draperies and rugs, cleaned some of the furniture, and painted the walls. It was an extensive and expensive project and the Club took out a note for $2,500 to pay for it.72

Some expenses were totally unplanned for and the Club faced two of those as a result of floods. Williamsport had been prone to flooding from the nearby Susquehanna River ever since it was founded in 1795. The greatest flood in its history had been in 1889, a tragedy better known as the Johnstown Flood because of the tremendous loss of life in that city, and a true disaster for the lumber industry, marking the beginning of its end in Williamsport. In the spring of 1936 the River crested at 33.9 feet and much of the city was flooded. The Club House experienced damage and the Club appointed a

65. Ibid.
70. Annual Meeting, Minutes, January 8, 1944. Folder: Minutes, Meetings, Board & Membership.
committee which included Margaret Lundy, then serving as President, to lead the recovery effort. The Club House needed extensive cleaning, new blinds and draperies, some furniture repair and re-upholstering and many new chairs for the dining area. Over 178 members contributed to the effort, giving their time and money, some of them donating needed items. The Club House was not fully returned to its pre-flood state until the end of 1937. The Club spent $1,200 on flood related repairs, and chose to meet its bills by paying less interest on its mortgage, clearly a risky choice but one done in consultation with its banker, Charles Schreyer. The City voted to build dikes in 1940 only to have that project deferred by the war. Flood waters returned in 1946 and did some damage to the Club but not nearly the amount of the one ten years earlier.

A major financial crisis occurred in 1942, the most important in the Club’s history. The Club had borrowed money from the beginning, its initial bills more than funds on hand. The leaders were convinced that income from new members in the form of stock sales and dues and the growth in the use of the kitchen would cover their needs. This strategy seemed to work until the slide in membership and the slowing down of income from that source. The Club was gradually paying down its debt. It was current on its note in 1929 at the West Branch National Bank and then the Lycoming Trust Company. It took out a new loan for the renovations which began that year. The Club voted to pay off this loan using the sum of the dues paid each year. In 1931 it reduced this payment to one-third of the dues collected. This strategy seemed to work and the Club paid off a note of $1,200 at the Lycoming Trust Company in 1934. Lucy Scott appealed for members to put bequests for the Club, and to institute a campaign for raising funds for this Club and for the purchase of a property for this Club, and to authorize its Board of Governors “to make arrangements for repurchase of the property to the bank in return “for a satisfaction of the mortgage and interest.” Attorney Decker remained the Club’s attorney and he was present for the discussion. He had suggested the satisfaction clause, which was that in exchange for deeding the Club House to the bank, the bank would forgive the outstanding interest and any other debt associated with the mortgage. In an unusual move, one that signaled the gravity of the decision, the members stood to cast their votes.

The bank accepted the arrangement, including the satisfaction clause, and for a brief period the Club was debt free, and of course, no longer owned any property. The bank permitted the Club to continue to use the Club House. Although the intent of the Club was to repurchase its property, it decided, again at Decker’s suggestion, to authorize its Board of Governors “to make arrangements for this Club and for the purchase of a property for this Club, and to institute a campaign for raising funds for the purchase of a club house.” This appears to have been a failsafe motion. The times were difficult and there was no certainty that the Club could buy back its property. What was certain was that the Club intended to continue, either on its site or on another. Such determination and commitment were good signs for the future.

Haskin set about negotiating with the West Branch Bank and Trust Company to regain the Club House almost as soon as the ink was dry on the agreement to surrender the property. At the Annual Meeting two years after the sale, January 8, 1944, she presented a Resolution that the Woman’s Club purchase the property at 414 Walnut Street, known as “The Club House” from the bank for the sum of $8,000, plus interest and insurance paid by the bank in 1943, which was $679. The transaction would include a check for $4,000 from the Club, another for $679, and in exchange a mortgage from the bank in the amount of $4,000. It would be a five year mortgage, at 4%. The Club members enthusiastically concurred, as well they should have, for the Club was in a position to pay off a much smaller mortgage in a reasonable amount of time. On January 16, 1944 the Woman’s Club had a

73. “The year 1936…”
81. Ibid.
second birth when Charles Schreyer sent Haskin a letter which confirmed the transaction and said the checks received “constitute payment to us of all the sums due us from the Womans (sic) Club at this time.”

The crisis was over. Haskin remained at the helm of the Finance Committee beyond the Silver Anniversary. The budgets soon passed $10,000 a year and the balance due on the mortgage fell at a steady rate. Rentals began to make a significant difference. At a meeting held on June 8, 1950 she reported to the membership: “We are in the best financial condition in the history of the Club.”

No one was in a better position to know. What she also knew was that financial security was like sustaining the membership: it was and would continue to be a major challenge, one Club leaders and members would face in the future.

**The Silver Anniversary**

When the Woman’s Club celebrated its Silver Anniversary it had much to be thankful for, beginning with the decision of the members of the Civic Club in 1923 to launch an effort to create a club house for women. The effort required the collective efforts of many able, intelligent people, none of whom seemed at all interested in claiming credit for the idea. Not long into the project the women discovered that they agreed that to have a club house they needed a new club to manage it, one not attached to a particular club or set of friends. These ideas provided the momentum and a number of leaders established the processes to reach the goal.

The first twenty-five years were the most important ones for the Club and its leaders, as they organized the Club, secured and renovated a club house, wrote a charter and by-laws, and developed an attractive program. These were significant steps into the future, but at times seemed to pale in the face of the challenges, which included acquiring and sustaining a strong membership, and establishing a secure and enduring financial structure. Each of these challenges was important to the future of the Club and serious enough at any given time that failure could have meant the end of the Club. The Club not only survived them but in the years after the war began to thrive.

The Silver Anniversary was also an important turning point. A new generation of leaders had been gradually taking the place of the first generation. In the years after 1950 the Club elected only one person President who was a Charter member, Beulah Cochran (Mrs. J. Henry), who served from 1954-56. New leaders included Jeannette Heether, Helen Nichols (Mrs. Samuel W.), and Muriel Sharon (Mrs. Bernard L.). In the years from 1962-1988, these three women occupied the presidency for twenty of the twenty-six years, Heether serving six two year terms, alternating with Nichols and Sharon. The Club became so attractive that it capped membership at 300 and had a long waiting list for many of these years. It was a remarkable period featured by growth and vitality, building on the successes of the women who had created and sustained it during the first twenty-five years.

**With Thanks.**

William Gibson, Lycoming County Genealogical Society
Mrs. Nancy Lady, Past-President, The Woman’s Club
Mrs. Mary Welch, Office Manager, The Woman’s Club
Interviews, Members of the Woman’s Club
Gary Parks, Executive Director, Lycoming County Historical Society
Scott Sagar, Curator, Lycoming County Historical Society
Shirley and David Abernathy
Charles Luppert

---

**About the Author**

**John F. Piper, Jr.** is retired Professor of History and Dean, Emeritus, of Lycoming College, and is a retired United Methodist pastor. He is a past president of the Lycoming County Historical Society and currently serves on the Board. He is the author of several books, including two related to the history of Lycoming County and Williamsport. He has written a history of Lycoming College, and is joint author with Robert Larson and Richard Morris of a history of Williamsport.

---

Lycoming County has a rich and varied musical history. Out of that history is the story of a local group that was popular on the local scene but went on to brief careers on the national and international stages.

It all began when, in 1946, someone gave a piano to the Russ and Martha Brownlee family of Williamsport, PA. Martha could play a little and the whole family was very much pleased when she sat down and gave a little rendition of her talent. Russ had been a professional trumpet player and had toured with dance bands until an illness of his wife and a growing family caused him to quit the road to take a factory job at Lycoming Motors. He did continue to play with local bands part time. Russ had previously taken a correspondence course on arranging and sat down at the piano and struck a few chords and said, “How about you kids hitting those notes?” The “kids” were Dolores, 19, Doris, 17, Phyllis, 13, and Frances, 11. It sounded pretty good and they practiced all evening and mastered “I’m Always Chasing Rainbows.” They thought they sounded pretty professional so they decided to become “The Brownlee Sisters”. Brothers Russ, Jr., 24 and Robert, 16, voiced their wholehearted support. Dolores and brother Russ had sung together some and had even been on the radio a couple of times. The other girls had never sung as a group.

The Brownlee family had always been a close-knit family and the four girls shared one bedroom the whole time while living at home. This closeness spilled over when they sang together. They loved being together and they really loved singing together. Their father bought music and arranged chords. Fran, the youngest, sang lead, Dolores, the lowest part, Doris, second alto, and Phyllis, first alto. They practiced for days to learn a new song. Russ was a loving and kind father, but he wanted it sung right. He gently, but firmly, corrected them. The girls did not resent the positive criticism and even when mother, Martha, thought they sounded pretty good, Russ would have the girls work on it more to get it better. Russ had to have a lot of patience because the girls would sometimes get “giggling spells” and he would have to wait to begin practice again. When not officially practicing, the four of them would sing around the house, on the front porch, and even out in the yard. They just had fun singing.

The first public appearance for the girls was at a small Republican Party meeting at the town of Quiggleville, PA. They sang one of Russ’s first arrangements: “Yes, We Have No Bananas.” The audience just sat there.
There was no response at all. The girls were devastated and returned home sniveling and crying. They said they would never sing in public again. Mother and dad tried to comfort them but that didn’t help much. The next day changed everything. Phone calls came in telling them how good they were and how much the audience had enjoyed them.

Rehearsals resumed and they performed for an audience of thousands at the 1946 “Kiddies Sing” held in Brandon Park. They would later sing on more of Mayor Leo C. Williamson’s “Community Sings”. They secured the services of pianist Tommy Thompson to serve as an accompanist. Martha soon was booking appearances and soon the girls were busy with practicing, work, school, dating, and performing. Fran, the youngest, sang lead. Delores sang the bottom part with Doris on second alto and Phyllis on first alto. They sang for banquets, parties, events at service clubs, community chest dinners, and other special occasions. At Christmastime, they would serenade patients at the WilliamSPORT Hospital. They performed with the “Johnny Nicholosi Orchestra,” a popular local dance band. They also had a number of appearances with the “Lee Vincent Orchestra,” based in Wilkes-Barre and the “Red McCarthy Band,” based in Harrisburg.

Sometime in 1947, they were visiting the Lock Haven Moose Club where their father was playing a job. They wanted to try out the mike and were singing in the empty room when a very large Indian chief came out on stage. He listened awhile and stated that he could not believe that these kids could sing that well. He invited the girls to join his act; that evening resulted in a good time that these kids could sing that well. He invited the girls to join his act; that evening resulted in a good time that resulted in an invitation to sing on a broadcast from the State Theater in Harrisburg. Later that year, they were invited for an appearance on radio station KYW in Philadelphia.

By 1948, the sisters had made over 100 appearances and felt they were now ready for something bigger. They decided to try their luck and attempt to get a spot on the “Horace Heidt Youth Opportunity Program” which was a nationally broadcast talent show on NBC radio. The local folks threw a big farewell party for them at the Antlers Club. The girls traveled to Hartford, Conn. where they went through the two-week auditioning process. Mr. and Mrs. Brownlee went along as well as Delores’ husband and eight month old baby. Part of the time they stayed with Mrs. Brownlee’s twin sister and part of the time in a hotel. The baby slept in a pulled out dresser drawer.

The girls were selected to be on the show and sang, “Yes, We Have No Bananas.” Dick Cantino, the famous accordionist and a regular with Heidt’s band, rushed from his dressing room and asked, “Who stopped the show?” It was the Brownlees. Unfortunately the audience, in a close decision, chose an accordion player. Mr. Heidt was surprised and shocked by the decision. He later told a show business acquaintance “…that the kids were as good as any song team in the big time.” He eased their disappointment by offering the girls a contract to tour with his band. Russ had always scored the accompaniments for piano and for orchestra as well as the girl’s four parts. Heidt also hired Russ to score the girls’ numbers for his orchestra. A short time later Mr. Brownlee and the girls, who were wearing new clothes furnished by local businessman Tommy Richardson, went by train to Chicago to join the Heidt organization. Tommy Richardson was quite a local celebrity and had been interested in the success of the girls for some time. They had even recorded a radio commercial promoting the new “Dynaflow Buick”. Unfortunately upon arriving in Chicago, the Brownlees found that the working conditions were not satisfactory and they were able to be released from their contract.

At some point, the Brownlees had engaged the William Morris Agency of New York City to aid them in getting bookings. In August of 1948, this resulted in getting a three-month contract to sing on WJZ, the flagship station of the ABC radio network located in New York City. This meant they had to learn a new song every week. Dad and mom drove them down and back every Saturday.

While in New York they met the DiMarco Sisters, a nationally known girls vocal quintet, who were regulars on the “Fred Allen Show”. The DiMarcos invited the Brownlees to their home in Brooklyn for a spaghetti dinner. They had a great time and to show the closeness one evening can bring, the DiMarcos signed a gift photograph “The 5 DiMarco Brats”. While in New York, Russ had a very beneficial talk with the DiMarcos’ arranger. He suggested that Russ incorporate the girls’ chords into the accompaniment and to also teach the girls to sing with the whole chord in place. Prior to that, Russ had taught each part separately and then put it together. This new method made it much easier to learn their parts.

In October of 1948 the girls met with disaster. They appeared on the Paul Whiteman show “Stage America” on ABC in Philadelphia. They sang “Night and Day” but, because of a different type of orchestral arrangement, they could not find their notes and got badly off key. They were embarrassed and devastated. Mr. Whiteman, however, was very understanding and told the girls “his orchestra was off that night”.

The girls recovered and in May of 1949 appeared on Marge Whiteman’s show “Tomorrow’s Tops” in Philadelphia. Whiteman was the daughter of the famous Paul Whiteman. In June they sang at the Bedford Springs Hotel in Bedford Springs, PA. Later in June they got a really big break. They appeared on Sammy Kaye’s “Chesterfield Supper Club”, which was broadcast from New York City. They sang the song “Nature Boy.” The band members especially liked their style of music and Kaye offered them a contract. However the Brownlees
did not like Kaye’s type of music and declined the offer. They had been treated very nicely and it was a good experience. While in New York they went to a nightclub and sat down at a table. They were told that there was a cover charge. They did not have that much money so the management let them sing for the patrons to pay for the cover charge. At this time the girls were also starting to get some notoriety because they started to get letters from songwriters in New York City asking them to “plug” their songs.

In October of 1949, and again in 1950, the girls were asked to join Pennsylvania Governor James Duff and a number of celebrities on his “Pennsylvania Week Tour.” This was not a political event but a one-week train trip to promote the good things about Pennsylvania. The train made stops in thirty Pennsylvania cities with the train stopping at four or five towns a day with a performance held on a flatcar. In the evening they would stop at a larger city where a major exhibition or banquet would be held. The tour ended at the Pennsylvania Farm Show grounds with performances on Saturday and Sunday. While they were on the train the girls slept in roomettes and ate their meals in the dining car. One of the very interesting events of the train ride was going around the Horseshoe Curve while riding outside on the flatcar. They also met many celebrities besides Governor Duff and other state officials. Ezra Stone, the voice of Henry Aldrich on national radio, was the master of ceremonies.

Other celebrities on the trips at one time or another were: Alexis Smith, the movie actress (they would later receive a Christmas card from her); Ham Fisher, who drew the “Joe Palooka” comic strip; John Charles Thomas, the Metropolitan Opera star; and Hedda Hopper, the Hollywood gossip columnist. At an evening stop in Pittsburgh, there was a banquet held at Kaufman’s department store. Danny Kaye, the famous Hollywood actor, was a guest for the evening. As the girls were singing the song, “I Didn’t Know The Gun Was Loaded,” Mr. Kaye got up and joined them for a chorus.

One person on the trip who was very loud in her praise for the girls was Hedda Hopper. She wrote in her national column that she had contacted “The Andrews Sisters” in Hollywood and that they had replied that if they liked them they would sponsor them and act as big sisters. The sisters also wrote to the Brownlees offering the same thing but adding the caution that it “would be a rough life.” The girls were very excited and discussed going to Hollywood but decided it was too big a step to take. After the trip, the girls received a thank-you letter from the radiomen thanking them for their cooperation during the trip. There was one downside to the trip. Both Phyllis and Fran had to miss a week of school. Phyllis’ principal had excused her to go, but when she got back she had to write a report and deliver it to the student body.

Earlier in 1950, the girls had been offered a three-week engagement on the “Ted Lewis Show” in Boston. They turned down the offer for a very good reason. Doris had just gotten married and no one wanted to spoil her honeymoon. At another point in 1950, Russ and Martha and the girls were in New York City and went to dinner at the Warwick Hotel. The “Page Cavanaugh Trio” was performing there. Someone told Page about the Brownlees and he invited them to sing a number. The audience loved them and they had to sing six encores.

The year 1951 would turn out to be a really big year for the Brownlees. It started with their singing at the “Inaugural Ball” for Governor Fine in Harrisburg. On June 24 they sang in New York City at the RKO Jefferson and on June 25 and 26 at Loews Orpheum. From August 7 to 14 they were on the bill at the famous New York City Palace Theater. They also appeared at the Lyceum Theater that same week. During that week they met “The Four Lads,” a top male vocal group who were very popular at that time. They were also able to meet the great Patti Page backstage at the Paramount Theater. Miss Page had recorded the song “With My Eyes Wide Open” in four-part harmony and had sung all four parts. The Brownlees had arranged their own version of the song and sang it for her. Miss Page was very complimentary and extremely nice to them.

Later that August the girls appeared on Arthur Godfrey’s “Talent Scouts” program in New York City on CBS. Mr. Godfrey was on vacation and Herb Schriner was his summer replacement host. Martha purchased special gowns for this TV appearance but when they got to New York they were told not to wear them. They were asked to put on sweaters and skirts, which was what the girls had usually worn for all their performances. A local paper reported that “the producers of the show said...
‘the girls were average American girls, unspoiled and happy, keep them that way.‘” They sang “Come On-a My House.” Big band leader, Tommy Dorsey, heard them on the show and is reported to have remarked “anybody who can make that song sound good had to be good”. He meant what he said because he contacted the girls and offered them an audition to sing with his band. The audition was scheduled to be held a short time later at Hecla Park, located near Bellefonte, PA.

On September 1 the girls appeared for a second time on Paul Whiteman’s show. This time the show was broadcast from New York City. Russ Brownlee had accompanied his daughters on this trip and after the show they were all invited to go with the band to “Walking Horse Farm,” which was Mr. Whiteman’s home in New Jersey. At the farm they were treated to a fine picnic. After the picnic, they participated in the making of a movie short. The film was later shown in Williamsport.

September 4 was the big day for the Dorsey audition. The girls were very excited and Russ was thrilled that Mr. Dorsey was to use his orchestral arrangement in accompanying his daughters. No one remembers what song they sang in front of that live audience, but Mr. Dorsey liked what he heard and offered them a job with his band. Now it was decision time for the girls. Should they take the chance of a lifetime or stay home? Delores was married and had two small children, aged 5 and 2. Doris was also married. Phyllis was working and Fran was a senior in high school. Both husbands agreed to let them go and Mrs. Brownlee and a close family friend agreed to take care of the children. Fran decided to quit school. The decision was made. They decided to go and what an adventure they were to have. A short time later Tommy Thompson, Dorsey’s musical arranger, came to Williamsport and spent a day at the Brownlee home. Accompanying him was his wife, Jonnie, who was singer Judy Garland’s sister. They spent the day talking about arrangements, but also had a very enjoyable time socializing with the Thompsons.

The girls joined the band in the middle of September at Syracuse, New York. The band played jobs in Washington, DC, and New York City and continued on for a tour of the New England states. There were many one-night engagements but the band played some longer jobs in larger cities. The band returned to New York City on two occasions. The first was to cut records for the Decca label. The Brownlees sang backup for singer Bob London on two records: “Solitaire” and “With My Eyes Wide Open.” The second occasion was for an appearance on the Kate Smith television show.

The appearance on the Kate Smith Show was the first time Tommy Dorsey and his band had ever been on this new media of television, so it was quite an occasion. TV standards were very different in that day and Miss Smith was especially fussy about dress. Francis Irvin, Dorsey’s female vocalist, usually wore a strapless gown. For this show, however, she had to even cover her bare shoulders. The Brownlees’ outfits were approved and they felt it quite an honor to be able to sing on this special occasion for the Dorsey band.

Riding on the bus could get a little tiring, but the girls passed the time enjoying the scenery, dozing sometimes and singing a lot. The band members would kid with them sometimes but always treated them with respect. Dorsey and his wife did not ride on the bus. They always traveled by automobile. Dorsey also did not eat with them, but one time treated them to dinner in a Chinese restaurant in Boston. Dorsey was always very nice to the girls. He looked out for them and treated the girls like a father. The girls liked Dorsey and they loved singing in front of a big band. During the New England trip Dolores’ and Doris’s husbands would drive up and join them for short periods of time. One of the stops on the tour was at a nightclub named The Rustic Cabin somewhere in New Jersey. Jonnie Thompson was in the audience and she came forward and stood in front of the girls while they were singing. She then started to make faces in order to make them laugh. Dorsey did not get angry, but just smiled.

While they were on tour the girls always dressed alike, usually in sweaters and skirts. They sat in front of the band with their legs crossed the same way. They coordinated changing positions at the same time. They did not get bored waiting for their numbers to come up. They really enjoyed the thrill of all the excitement of being with a big band (they even enjoyed rehearsals). Dorsey did not always tell them which of their numbers they would sing. He would just call out number six or number eight, etc. The girls performed twelve different numbers by themselves with the band and three as backup for Bob London. One number that they sang a lot was “The Sunny Side Of The Street.” During a typical evening the girls would sing two or three numbers. On tour the girls slept in one room together and did their laundry in the bathroom sinks. They ran around together and, in spite of homesickness, had a great time. They had fun performing and were becoming celebrities, as people were now asking for autographs. Three of the band members who were on the early part of the tour would later become very well known. They were “Doc” Severinson, Sam Donahue, and “Buddy” Rich.

In early November, the band traveled by bus to perform in Montreal and Quebec, Canada. When they were at the border crossing, the border guards kidded the girls and made them sing a number before they let the bus across. While they were in Canada, the band took time off to fly to Chicago for a week’s engagement at a fancy hotel. As they checked in, Dorsey was told that his lead trumpet player, who was black, could not stay there. Dorsey told them if the man could not stay, the band wouldn’t play. They all stayed.

At the end of the Canadian tour the band returned to New York City and on November 24 flew to Rio de...
Janeiro, Brazil. They were initially booked to stay in a downtown hotel but Dorsey moved them all to a hotel on the beach. This made the girls very happy because they could now spend off-time swimming and sunbathing on the beautiful Rio beach. Of course there was some sunburn, but it was worth it. Occasionally an American family who had seen their show would take them on a sightseeing tour. Sometimes, after a show, they would stay up and join some of the band members in a “jam” session. They did get more homesick in Brazil and Dorsey kidded them by saying “when you are not singing, you are always writing letters.” Return letters from home and the excitement of performing helped a lot. One of the things that had surprised them when they arrived there was to see that the large billboards advertising the Dorsey Band had Dorsey’s name at the top and next in billing the Brownlee Sisters. Bob London and Francis Irvin came below. It was a real thrill to see their name advertised that way. One exciting event in Rio was when the captain of the luxury liner SS Brazil, which was docked there, invited them to be his dinner guests. He had heard them sing at the club and of course they had to sing on the ship. He was so impressed that he offered to get them a job with the steamship line. The girls politely refused his offer. One downside on the trip was they still had to do all their laundry in the bathroom sinks. With only two outfits that they wore for performances this proved to be a bit of a chore.

Although performance schedules varied from place to place on a Dorsey tour and were not always this demanding, this is an example of one followed during the Rio de Janeiro performances.

*Daily Radio or TV Show over station TUPY:*
  - at 10:00-10:30 PM
  - Nightly at the “Night and Day Club”:
    - One show from 12:30 -1: 15 AM
    - Dancing 1:45 -2: 30 AM
  - Wednesday & Friday Matinee 6:00 - 6:45 PM
  - (Not determined as to dance or Show)

On December 9, they flew to Sao Paulo where they stayed until the end of December; then on to Fortaleza January 1, where they had a four-day stay. While they were there the US Consul invited the girls to stay at his home. Unfortunately, Phyllis came down with a severe case of dysentery. Mr. Dorsey was very concerned and a local doctor was called. He gave Phyllis a shot with a needle sterilized in a glass of beer. It was the only case of dysentery. Mr. Dorsey was very concerned and a local doctor was called. He gave Phyllis a shot with a needle sterilized in a glass of beer. It was the only time on the Dorsey tour that the girls missed a show performance.

On January 4 they continued on to Recife. While they were at Recife a gunfight broke out at the nightclub where they were performing and everyone ducked under tables. From then on armed guards were stationed outside the girls’ bedroom door every night. A more pleasant experience was when the girls entertained US navy sailors at the base there. The sailors served the girls a supper of steak and french fries.

On one of the flights between cities, they flew on an old converted army plane. It still had slots in the windows for the placement of machine guns. It turned out to be a freezing cold flight. On January 13, 1952, they flew back to Rio and played for their last week of the Brazilian tour. The band flew back to the United States and landed in Miami. The first thing the girls did was to eat a good old US hamburger. The girls flew to Harrisburg where the husbands of Dolores and Doris were waiting to take them the rest of the way home. When they arrived home, they discovered that Mrs. Brownlee had kept the Christmas tree up. It was a great thrill to be back again with family.

It had been a rewarding, enjoyable and exciting experience. During the tour they had met many interesting and famous people and, for a while, they were “celebrities”. They had loved singing as a family unit and really enjoyed singing with the “big Dorsey band.” They knew they would miss the fans and the excitement of show business but it was now time to be home.

Dorsey had wanted the girls to stay with him but they decided that being with family and raising their children was more important. The girls did not retire completely. They continued to sing locally from time to time. One show they did was at Bob and Dean McNett’s Radio Corral located near Montgomery, PA. They shared the stage that day with the Grand Ole Opry stars, the Carter Sisters. During the summer of 1953, they turned down an offer to do a show with the nationally famous Vaughn Monroe Band. In July of that year, they did go on the Dennis James show “Chance of A Lifetime” in New York City. Four years later they sang at a large outdoor stage at a fair somewhere in New Jersey. It must have been an important event because Fran joined them for the show while she was on her honeymoon. That was their last major appearance.

The girls did not stop singing altogether. Close family ties had always been very important for the Brownlee family; every year the family gathered together on Thanksgiving evening and at family reunions every
summer. On these occasions the sisters would entertain the family. Family members relate that when the four of them got up to sing they were suddenly transformed into a professional looking group and sang with perfect precision. Many years would pass but there would be one last performance by “The Brownlee Sisters.” The occasion would be at the dedication of the painting of the sisters on the large mural located opposite the Community Arts Center in downtown Williamsport on June 7, 2007. They sang “I Don’t Know Why I Love You Like I Do” one last time.

**Appendix**

- Fred Allen: radio comedian whose national radio show was one of the highest rated shows during the 1930’s and 1940’s.
- Andrews Sisters: the top female singing trio of the Big Band Era. They sold more than seventy-five million records.
- Big Band Era: name given to the era of the 1930’s and 1940’s during which Swing music became very popular. The average band consisted of 15 to 25 musicians and most of them featured either instrumental or vocal soloists. There were at least fifty of these bands that became nationally famous.
- Page Cavanaugh: jazz and pop pianist, vocalist and arranger. Formed a trio that was popular during the Big Band Era and beyond.
- Dick Cantino: billed as the world’s greatest accordion player. He toured with the Horace Heidt orchestra.
- Carter Sisters: nationally famous country music singers and Grand Ole Opry stars.
- DiMarco Sisters: five sisters known for lush sweeping harmony. They were recording stars and had appeared as regulars on the Fred Allen program every week for four years.
- Tommy Dorsey: trombonist and bandleader. He was known as the “Sentimental Gentleman of Swing” due to his smooth trombone playing. His band is considered to be one of the top three or four bands of the Big Band Era.
- Ham Fisher: the comic strip writer who was known for the strip Joe Palooka from c.1940.
- Horace Heidt: dance bandleader, radio and television personality. His talent show was one of the first on television.
- Hedda Hopper: former actress who became a nationally known and very influential gossip columnist.
- Danny Kaye: very famous movie actor and comedian whose film career lasted from 1935 to 1969.
- Sammy Kaye: bandleader and songwriter. His band was one of the most famous during the Big Band Era.
- The Four Lads: popular male singing quartet, which earned many gold records and albums during the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s. They also made many television appearances.
- Ted Lewis: entertainer, bandleader, singer and recording artist. He was active professionally from 1919 to well into the 1960’s.
- Vaughn Monroe: a major bandleader, singer, and recording artist.
- Patti Page: one of the best-known female artists in traditional pop music. She has sold more than 100 million records.
- Herb Shriner: humorist, radio and television personality. He was known for his homespun monologues and frequently compared to humorist Will Rogers.
- Alexis Smith: nationally known stage, film, and television actress. She appeared in 53 movies during a career that lasted from 1940 to 1993.
- Kate Smith: singer who was active on the national stage from the early 1930’s to the early 1960’s.
- Ezra Stone: famous as the voice of Henry Aldrich on national radio. He also had a long career as a director in stage, films, radio and television.
- John Charles Thomas: was a popular concert baritone and Metropolitan Opera star.
- Paul Whiteman: leader of the most popular orchestra during the 1920’s with 28 number one records during that period. He continued to be active into the 1950’s and recorded four more number-one hits.

**Sources**

- Personal interviews with Phyllis Witmer and Frances Santalucia in November and December of 2010.
- Personal scrapbooks of various materials collected by Phyllis Witmer.
- Graphics and Editing by Robert S. Ulrich
Dr. Kenneth R. Raessler and Williamsport’s School Music Program:
The Importance of Proficient* Leadership

By Oscar W. Knade, Jr., EdD

The 5th Century B.C. Greek classical philosopher, Plato, wrote: “I would teach children music, physics, and philosophy; but most importantly music, for the patterns in music and all the arts are the keys to learning.” Educators who have followed this principle over the course of history have enabled their students to add immeasurable, enduring richness to the culture of their time and our’s as well.

The musical heritage of our area is rich because Williamsport has a long, though uneven, history of supporting the arts, particularly music. The Repasz Band is a striking example. It has remained a vibrant organization since the band was formed in 1831. Williamsport had a symphony orchestra back in 1915. It was directed by E. Hart Bugbee. That is quite an accomplishment for a small, rural community. The orchestra’s name experienced several iterations in the following years. In 1933, during “The Great Depression,” it became the Rural Works Development Orchestra and in 1940 was renamed the Williamsport Civic Orchestra.

It disappeared during World War Two, but was reorganized in 1947 and led by Osborne Housel, a Williamsport music educator. Numerous public concerts were given until Housel’s death in 1957. Subsequently, music in the schools became less valued, I believe, because of the lack of a masterful leader and advocate, such as Housel. While there is no certain causal relationship, Williamsport was not able to boast of having its own city-based symphony orchestra again until 1984 when the Susquehanna Valley Symphony Orchestra, which drew musicians from four counties in central Pennsylvania and with the late Rolf Smedvig as music director, changed its name.

When I became Superintendent of the Williamsport Area School District in 1972, the music education program was fragmented; there were three supervisors and they did not communicate much with each other, much like silos along the side of a barn. There was no K-12 curriculum for classroom music and the instrumental programs had no continuity. In fact, the string program extended only to grade six. There was no practice time for ensembles during the school day, except at the high school. The high school band had only a few dozen playing members out of a student body of 2,400, in grades ten to twelve. Those are just a few of what I later learned were even more deficiencies in our classroom and performance music programs. I believed that the Williamsport community deserved better and I was determined that our schools would have a first rate program.

Making that happen would require a reorganization of the faculty and visionary leadership at the program level from a formally educated and artistically skilled music educator. That meant abolishing the three existing supervisory positions and creating just one for the entire school district. After gaining school board approval for the reorganization, I began a search and called my former college classmate and long-time friend, Dr. Kenneth R. Raessler for some leads. He was then chair of the Department of Music at Gettysburg College.

I became acquainted with Ken during our freshman year at what is now West Chester University. Upon graduation, Ken began his teaching career in Belvidere, New Jersey and I spent two years in the United States Army, much of it in Germany. We reconnected about a year after my return to the U.S.

That year, Ken and I discovered that we both were engaged in graduate study at Temple University. Shirley and I were newlyweds and Ken was an occasional guest in our apartment in Lansdowne, PA. Soon after, we attended his wedding and met Joyce. In the following decades, the Raesslers and the Knades, with growing families, visited back and forth during our working years, and we have traveled to many near and distant places together in retirement.

Now, back to the search for a music education leader. After learning what was out there, interviewing several persons for the WASD new music program leadership position, and being less than satisfied with the search, I called Ken for more advice. He said he would give our situation some additional thought and call me back. About two weeks later, he called and asked me if it would effect our friendship adversely if he were to apply for the position. He saw the job as an opportunity to put into practice principles and practices he had formulated and was teaching at the college and thought it time to test them in a public school setting. I assured him that our friendship would continue as before but with considerably less travel distance to maintain it.
I advised the school board that I had a candidate to recommend. Dr. Raessler was interviewed by the board and subsequently employed as K-12 Supervisor of Music Education. He began work in the district in 1973.

We shared a vision for a world class district music program. Our goals were that in ten years, we would have articulated K-12 classroom, instrumental and choral programs, including a symphonic band and orchestra. We wanted a tournament-winning marching band so good that it might even result in the football game occurring during half time of a band show.

Most importantly, we were determined to see the total program become “institutionalized” by encouraging parent participation at all levels and building community support so solid that it would stay secure despite future changes in superintendents and school board members.

We partnered in this endeavor. As Superintendent, I reported regularly to the school board on new developments indicating progress toward accomplishing these goals and always kept the members in the loop when some organizational changes might be needed.

I was the program’s advocate with the Board for adequate budgetary resources and appropriate staffing levels, and I dealt with the critics, both within and without. As for Ken’s part as Supervisor of Music Education, he worked hard and smart to turn the vision into reality with proficient leadership, savvy faculty recruiting, fiscal and program accountability, and a marvelous sense of showmanship.

Twelve years later, in 1985, the WASD music program was recognized by the Music Educators National Conference as one of four exemplary music programs in the United States. That recognition stimulated similar striving for excellence by faculty in other WASD curricular and extra-curricular areas, many of which subsequently were recognized for their quality as well.

The Williamsport music program is seen as a model by many school districts throughout the nation. It has had a lifelong impact on thousands of talented young people who have come through the program. This year, for the sixteenth time, Williamsport has been cited as being among the nation’s top 100 communities for music education by the National Association of Music Merchants.

The printed program for a recent presentation of the musical, “Fiddler on the Roof,” by the Williamsport Area High School, contained a description of the Williamsport Music Education Department. It lists numerous awards and citations for the program’s excellence and the current WASD music faculty.

How did all of this come about? In two words, PROFIICNT LEADERSHIP. (Proficient: having the knowledge, skill and experience needed for success in a particular field or endeavor.)

My view of the school district superintendency, is that educational excellence can be achieved when a school board provides for expert leadership of faculty and staff in major curricular fields such as the arts and all major curricular areas. This is critical to getting those programs on the road to excellence and keeping them there. I was blessed to have many school board members during my twenty years in the WASD who shared that view.

This view often runs counter to that of some citizens and taxpayers, and even some newly sworn school board members. They have little understanding of what it takes to mount excellent programs—and they often have no children in school. To them, it’s all about taxes—and maybe football.

Managing a large and complex program requires a credible leader who has the professional expertise to be a resource and guide for the faculty, as well as to manage many administrative tasks. These include, at least, preparing and defending a budget, recruiting exceptional faculty, assigning faculty appropriately, conducting teacher performance evaluations, supervising concert production, communicating with parents, arranging for ensemble performances in school and at venues outside of school, managing publicity and more.

Asking teachers to perform these administrative tasks usually results in their giving their teaching responsibilities priority and leaving the administrative responsibilities to “I’ll do it whenever I can get to it.” It is too much to expect dedicated classroom teachers to perform administrative functions as well. Combining functions in the same individual reduces effective performance in both endeavors.

As with any curricular program, the music program has been successful because it has a sequential, K-12 curriculum, delivered by highly skilled teachers who are some of the best in the business and who work as a K-12 team. For that to continue, the music program needs a full-time artistic leader who is a Pennsylvania certified curriculum supervisor:

1. a person who can ensure that the K-12 curriculum sequence is not interrupted. Building principals are concerned about building issues, reading and math, and certainly not about how the classroom art class fits into the K-12 art curriculum continuum.

2. a person who is responsible for ensuring that all faculty are successful, and delivering their segments of the K-12 curriculum with fidelity.

3. a person who is responsible for ensuring that high quality faculty continue to be hired to fill vacancies when they occur. The district Human Resources director usually is not part of the music educator network and is highly unlikely to be able to determine if the potential hire is musically competent.

That is what Dr. Kenneth Raessler and his successor, Mr. Richard Coulter have done over the past 40 plus years. Unfortunately, there is no proficient leader with
supervisory authority in place in the district now and there hasn’t been since Rick Coulter retired two years ago.

I hope the program they built and maintained doesn’t suffer the same fate as did music in our schools and community, when Osborne Housel died in 1957, or as has been happening in numerous school districts across our nation where school boards have sacrificed the arts to the competing demands of high stakes testing, other costly mandates and declining state financial support. (Federal data from 2012 showed that Pennsylvania has the most inequitable educational finance system in the U. S.)

I learned recently that Williamsport school board’s finance committee told a parent advocacy group that next year’s budget will contain no funds for some existing supervisory positions. Building principals will be expected to handle the managerial aspects of these programs. What can they be thinking? Principals rarely are proficient in arts education and administration.

Ken Raessler told me in his last days that maintaining the integrity and continuity of the K-12 curriculum of the classroom and performance aspects of the program was the key to program excellence and that requires program leadership and advocacy. Athletics would not be left up to the principals to administer, you can be sure. That’s why most school districts of any size have athletic directors. The visual and performing arts are just as complicated to administer as athletics and certainly deserve district-wide coordination and direction.

Around 1987 or 1988, Dr. Raessler began to consider moving on to higher education. He realized that the goals we set back in 1973 were largely achieved and that Williamsport had arrived as an exemplary school music program. He finally settled, in 1989, on Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas where he was named head of the department of music.

He became a devoted Horned Frog. He applied many of the same principles in re-creating the TCU program as he had used in Williamsport. By the time of his retirement in 2001, the department had been elevated to a School of Music, had expanded its band and orchestral programs, had become an “All Steinway” school, had developed extension programs in Latin America, and had a new campus center for the performing arts.

Dr. Raessler continued to advocate for school music programs across this country and others as a clinician and keynote speaker, particularly at state conventions of music educators. One of his great joys was to track TCU performance majors as they developed their own artistic careers.

Dr. Raessler donated a large collection of archival materials from his Williamsport experience to the Lycoming County Historical Society in 2013, to be preserved in perpetuity for research and historical purposes.

Over the course of his lengthy career as a music educator, clinician, author and advocate for music education, Dr. Raessler received many personal awards. The two he prized most, however, and wanted displayed at his funeral service in Fort Worth on March 21, 2015 were the PMEA Hall of Fame award and his designation by the National Association for Music Education as a “Lowell Mason Fellow,” their highest honor.

In his book, Aspiring to Excel, which was based in part on his experience in developing the WASD music program, Dr. Raessler wrote: “The true leader will be quick to recognize and celebrate excellence in others, embrace their success, and share in their joy.” Ken Raessler was that kind of leader in music education throughout his entire career.

Dr. Knade has an extensive background in teaching and school administration. He began his career in education as a teacher in Springfield Township, Delaware County, Pennsylvania in 1956. After service in the New Jersey and Philadelphia school systems, Dr. Knade was named superintendent of the Williamsport Area School District in 1972. He served in that position until 1992. The district and Dr. Knade, personally, have been honored by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, National Council of Teachers of English, Pennsylvania Music Educators Association, the Pennsylvania State Education Association and other state and national organizations. A graduate of Northeast High School, Philadelphia, and West Chester State University, Dr. Knade received his master’s degree and a doctorate in educational administration from Temple University. He received the Phi Delta Kappa graduate award for the highest scholastic average in doctoral studies in 1965. He was inducted into the Northeast High School Hall of Fame in 1994 for lifetime professional achievements.

Locally, Dr. Knade has been or is a member of the boards of directors of the Lycoming United Way, Preservation Williamsport, the Rotary Club of Williamsport, the James V. Brown Library, Lycoming County American Red Cross, Hope Enterprises, and the Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy.

His friendship with Dr. Kenneth Raessler prompted this tribute to Dr. Raessler.
Board of Governors

Charles Luppert, President
Marc Pompeo, Vice President
Susan K. Beidler, Secretary
Randy DiPalo, Treasurer
Larry Fryda, Member at Large
Gary Weber, Member at Large

Chuck Anderson
Jim Carn
Eiderson Dean

Bruce Huffman
Penny Lutz
Ed Metzger
Dewey Oakes

John F. Piper, Jr.
John Raymond
Carol Sones Shetler

Museum Staff

Gary W. Parks, Director, Editor
Scott Sagar, Curator of Collections
Kimberly Taylor, Administrative Assistant/Bookkeeper
Anne Persun, Museum Store Manager / Front Desk Reception
Patty Bowman and Andrew Corll, Part-time Reception/Cashiers
Recardo Strothers and Scott Evens, Custodians

Volunteers

Mark Anderman
Tom “Tank” Baird
Susan Baker
Galen Betzer
Judy Blee
Jeff Byerly
Gwen Cornell
Shirley Crawley
Pat Damaska
Joni Decker
Jonathan Deprenda
Ruth Ditchfield
Victor Engel
Linda Estupinan-Snook
Gary Fogelman
Roger Goodman
Sharon Goss
Maria Gustafson
Brad Hall
Lucy Henry
Charles Hess, Jr.
Martha Huddy
John Hunsinger
Robert Kane, Jr.
Larry Keller
Susan Kelly
Don King

Shirley Knade
Joseph Kustanbauter
Amy Kutay
Sarah Lamade
Ted Larson Jr.
Carolyn Ludwig
Norman Ludwig
Dorothy Maples
Jim Maule
Kari McCoy
Joy McCracken
Rob Mueller
Wayne Palmer
Bea Parker
LaRue Pepperman
Charles Persun
Eleanor Phillips
Linda Phillips
Ashley Rall
Sandra Rife
Bob Schiltz
Roger Shipley
Rita Shoemaker
Mary Sieminski
Franklin Ulman
Robert Wallace
Rose Ann Wallace

Rebecca Wither
Kayleigh Woods
Glenn Williams

Genealogy Volunteers

Dennis Ault
Kay Bittner
Kay Collins
Vicki Enigk
William Gibson
Tom Gouldy
Mary Guinter
Kitty Hofer
George Holmes
Joan Knight
Louise Latsha
Mary Lyons
Nancy McCurdy
Karen Stotz Myers
Christine Smith
Helen Yoas

Work Study Students/Interns

Kimberly Cady
Alicia Skeath

The Lycoming County Historical Society is a not-for-profit educational organization with a museum, library and archives; its purpose is to discover, collect, preserve and interpret the pre-historical, historical and cultural heritage of north central Pennsylvania.