

WCA NEWS from HOME



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Marking our 125th Anniversary by recovering our past

This year marks the 125th anniversary of the WCA Home and in honor of that milestone, its board of directors is collecting historical materials to preserve a timeline and narrative of its existence from 1892 to the present. ✨

Ten women met to create the WCA for charity

Exercising leadership and a spirit of public service before they had the right to vote, ten women met in January 1892 at the home of Sarah and Francis B. Palmer (Principal of the Fredonia Normal School) to organize a charity. In addition to Mrs. Palmer, they were: Marion H. Morris, Mary T. Putnam, Ellen White, Helen Moore, Flora Clothier, Ann Burrett, Clara Morris Albro, Harriet Hale, and Maria Day. At that meeting, they created the Women's Christian Association and elected Mrs. Morris as their president. The women worshipped in various churches in Fredonia.

Who were these women? Finding that answer is the project of the WCA Home's Board of Directors as we celebrate our 125th Anniversary. We want to learn more about them and how they started a charity that would shelter and service women at their most vulnerable — during old age and increasing frailty. Their goal was not an easy one, and it took money, connections, smarts and personal passion to realize it. ✨



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A “search and rescue” for the WCA Home’s Founder

Our research, built upon that of local historian Doug Shepard, Ph.D., provides the evidence that a woman named Marion H. Morris was the founding benefactor and visionary of the WCA Home. She was President of the Women’s Christian Association from its first meeting through the following four years until her early death from an illness.

Aaron O. and Mary T. Putnam built, owned and were living in the home at 134 Temple Street when Mrs. Putnam helped organize the Fredonia WCA. Early in 1892, when the group was seeking a suitable site for their project, the Putnams began considering a move to a smaller home. With the house becoming available, President Morris saw it as “suited substantially the requirements” of the WCA Home. The WCA and the Putnams negotiated a price of \$8,000 for the home, which, according to the Consumer Price Index is equivalent to \$206,000 today.

Minutes of the meeting show that the board did not possess \$8,000 but would need to raise the money. President Morris eased the pressure considerably by pledging half of the purchase price from her personal account as the down payment. Evidence shows that they raised the rest of the money from community donors, and also took out a five-year mortgage. The minutes reveal that two people voted against purchasing the Putnam home, while 22 voted in favor. The possession of the home took place the May 2, 1893, when Mr. Putnam turned the keys over to a committee of four: Mrs. Curtis, Mrs. Palmer, Mrs. Pratt and Mrs. Morris.

Twenty-five years later, WCA board member Elizabeth Day wrote a piece in the *Dunkirk Observer* appealing for contributions to the Home on its silver anniversary. She wrote, “November next marks the 25th anniversary of the founding of a home for aged women by Mrs. Marion H. Morris, whose boundless generosity has made possible this Christian home for worthy women of 65 or over, who for the best of reasons are no longer able to maintain themselves or have no near relatives upon whom they can depend financially.” ✱



Our 2017 Trunk Sale was another success. The proceeds will fund our summer luncheon at Shorewood Country Club in August, when we will welcome as guests of honor all of our residents and their families. Thanks to all of our community supporters!



It's deck time at the WCA Home!

WCA Home founder Mrs. Marion H. Morris raised her daughter at this home on East Main Street, now the offices of Johnson Mackowiak & Associates.



Who was Marion H. Morris?

Marion Hovey was born in Connecticut to a distinguished family. Her father was a doctor. She moved to New York State's Oneida County with her family, and married Leander J. Stillman, a merchant. He died young, leaving her a widow at age 33, and a single mother of four-year old Angelia. Five years later she and Angelia were living in Fredonia in a brick home she bought on the north side of East Main Street between White and Cushing. With personal wealth, Marion was able to raise her daughter in great comfort and privilege. But at the age of 22, Angelia, now engaged to be married, contracted diphtheria and died. According to the *Fredonia Censor*, Angelia was "one of the loveliest young ladies in our village" and was "the idol of her mother."

A few years later, at age 53, Marion married the Hon. Lorenzo Morris, a widower who lived across the street at 67 East Main. An attorney and former State Senator, he was highly respected throughout the state. As a justice and president of the board of the Fredonia Normal School, he was instrumental in improving the school and hiring Francis B. Palmer as its Principal. Senator Morris had three adult children, and his two daughters were married and lived in Fredonia (his son's daughter became the aunt by marriage to Jack Kemp, US Congressman and football legend). Both of his daughters, Clara Morris Albro and Ellen Morris Russell, joined their stepmother in supporting the WCA Home. ✨

The opening of the Home

The WCA Home first opened to the public after almost two years of preparations at the end of 1893. Its dedication was a large affair written up in the newspaper. At that ceremony, the Rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, Dr. J.J. Landers, singled out Mrs. Morris: "When all that love and wealth could not save her daughter's young life, the bereaved mother seemed to desire to have the fortune that would have been her daughter's devoted to some beneficent purpose. Her liberal generosity had been the chief means for establishing this Home."

Marion died three years later from an illness, at the young age of 66. But her final gift to the WCA Home was a bequest of \$20,000, a value today of \$500,000. This ensured the sustainability of a venture that was risky to begin with, but proved to be lasting in its benefits, and a key presence in the village throughout the next century and beyond. ✨



Special year for a Donation: \$125 for 125 years

Historical records are clarifying that private donations have always been the underpinning of the home's financial sustainability. In honor of the founding of The WCA Home 125 years ago, we are asking people to make a gift of \$125 this year. If this is in your ability, please consider it as a gesture of your support. ✨

Examples of donations in 1930s and '40s

Some donors in the 1930s and 1940s included: the Putnam's daughter, Charlotte Landers, who gifted the home with all of her household furnishings in her will—as the Putnams' only child she was well-off, widowed, and childless. Alice Stewart of Collins gave nearly \$50,000 (today's value) which was used to buy a new heating system; an unknown donor gave a wheat farm in Illinois that brought a yearly income of \$600 (\$10,000 today); two Dunkirk sisters (the Misses Herrick) built an annex of six more rooms--two of which they chose to move into and lived in until their deaths; Clara Clees of Silver Creek made an estate gift valued today at \$200,000. A gift of \$500 in 1939 from the Fredonia Garden Club was gratefully accepted — a healthy sum of \$8,600 in today's world. ✨



Assisted Living care

- ✨ Nursing services as needed
- ✨ Medical supplies and equipment
- ✨ Therapies: physical, occupational, and speech
- ✨ Your individual program supervised by an R.N.
- ✨ One-on-one help for bathing, dressing, and grooming
- ✨ Medicaid billable for those eligible

