

**A CENTURY
OF
CARING**

**THE GLENS FALLS HOME
1899–1999**



**CENTENNIAL PROGRAM
WITH A BRIEF HISTORY**

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

SEPTEMBER 12, 1999

11:30 GATHERING

- An opportunity to visit The Home, view a short video recounting the history of The Glens Falls Home, and enjoy light refreshments

12:00 WELCOME CEREMONY

- Invocation: The Reverend Lamont Robinson
- Assemblywoman Betty Little
- Honorable Robert Regan, Mayor of Glens Falls
- Honorable Fred Champagne, Supervisor, Town of Queensbury
- Reading of “The Old Man Dreams” by Oliver Wendell Holmes — Mary Lou Noone

12:30 “THROUGH THE YEARS”

- Performed by Laura Roth with current residents of The Glens Falls Home

1:00 GALA CENTENNIAL PICNIC

- Entertainment by The Starting Gate Barbershop Quartet
- Ballroom dancing exhibition by Dan and Becky Malloy

3:00 PROCEED TO THE GLEN AT HILAND MEADOWS

3:30 PLANTING OF THE CENTENNIAL TREE

- Accompanied by the Adirondack Pipes and Drums

*Music provided throughout the day by
Dick Caselli and The Ambassadors of Music*

THE GLENS FALLS HOME

A BRIEF HISTORY: 1899–1999



The Conkling House—the first Glens Falls Home

WE ARE CELEBRATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY, AND A CENTURY OF SERVICE, OF THE GLENS FALLS HOME. What began as a local expression of the late 19th century’s progressive movement for elder care became a proven concept and a community institution during the 20th century. Now on the eve of the millennium, The Glens Falls Home is expanding to be ready for the incoming 21st century and beyond.

Most of us today do not realize that the red brick structure on 178 Warren Street in Glens Falls is actually the second building of The Glens Falls Home. However, perhaps the greatest “unknown” in our institution’s history is how innovative the concept behind the Glens Falls Home truly was for its time. The idea for a home for “aged, indigent and infirm women” had been “apparent for a long time,” it was noted in the Glens Falls Home’s first annual report for 1899–1900. In fact it appears that it had been an idea dating to at least 1896, and among many different individuals and groups. Nothing like it had been initiated before in Glens Falls, at that time a village in the Town of Queensbury. However, similar institutions existed in similar sized towns and cities in New York and neighboring states.

The Glens Falls Home's origins are part of an overall progressive movement that swept the village and town at that time. That movement gave birth to, among things, the first public library (Crandall Library in 1893), the first public hospital (Glens Falls Hospital in 1897), and the first public park (Crandall Park in 1898).

By 1897, the idea for this Home turned to action. A group of concerned citizens representing five major churches of the village—Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopalian, Baptist and Society of Friends—met on November 27, 1897. More recent histories of the home have credited two women, Mrs. Daniel DeLong and Mrs. B.B. Fowler, with starting the movement for a home for women who were aged and without the financial means to support themselves. A local newspaper of the day reported that of the seventeen people present, the majority, ten in all, were women. According to the paper, present at the meeting were these women: “Mesdames H.L. Sherman, B.B. Fowler, William McEchron, R.N. Peck, S.A. Parks, H.S. Paine, D.S. Saylor, D.J. Finch, A. Armstrong and Sherman Williams.” It reported the names of these men: Daniel P. DeLong, Charles P. Wilson, Russell A. Little, Merritt Ames, Henry Crandall, J.M. Varney and James A. Holden.

The group met again the next day at the Rockwell House, the major hotel of the village, located on Glen Street where Hudson Avenue today intersects with Glen. There they unanimously approved the creation of “a home for aged women,” which would “for the present...be known as ‘The Glens Falls Home.’”

It would give some idea of the immense support for the project to discuss a few of the important “names” of that day who lent their influence to the project. Some are recognizable to us today. Certainly Henry Crandall is known today as the creator of the Crandall Library and Crandall Park, among other things. His first action was to offer his home to be the Glens Falls Home. James A. Holden was a banker and a man of incredible influence. However, he is remembered most today for being the co-founder of the New York State Historical Association and for being the third New York State Historian. Merritt Ames owned Ames Chemical,

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a silver-reprocessing firm. Russell A. Little was president of the Glens Falls Insurance Company. And if Mrs. Daniel Delong's surname seems familiar, you could be thinking of the Delong House of the Chapman Historical Museum, once the boyhood home of her husband.

We saved discussion of the women because, although it may seem that they are of secondary importance in the overall creation of the Glens Falls Home, the opposite is true. As mentioned, Mrs. Daniel Delong and Mrs. B.B. Fowler initiated the idea for the Glens Falls Home. Both were active in civic organizations led by women, such as the Women's Civic Club of Glens Falls and the Glens Falls Hospital Guild. Many other women of the community joined with them to be the organizers and ultimate managers of the Home. Their role must not be underestimated.

Concerning the references to these women, where first names were available, they have been used in this history; otherwise they have been copied verbatim from annual reports and news clippings. Please remember that it was not the etiquette of the day for the newspapers or annual reports of the Home to use a woman's first name. Each woman was always referred to by her husband's first name. Also, none of the women would have worked outside the home. (Heaven forbid!)

Two boards, one for each gender, were created: a "board of directors," all male; and a "board of lady managers." The former would essentially oversee the Home's finances and investments, while the lady managers were to oversee all management. The board of lady managers' role also included fund raising. The Glens Falls Home provided women with another way to break from Victorian social restrictions, to use their intelligence and to exert power within the community.

Their power and influence were formidable. They would use them to solicit funds, garner donations of goods and services, and to get their husbands to sit on the board of directors, thereby attracting others of power and influence. For example, in 1901 William McEchron, husband of one of the founders, offered to donate the entire sum needed for a new building for the Home. Was this solely his idea? Did he do this alone? We know better.

The relationship of these founders to the Glens Falls Home was a commitment often handed down from generation to generation. For example, Egbert W. West's daughter, Dorothy West Bowden, would later serve on the board, as would her daughters, Elizabeth Bowden Day and Margaret Bowden Krarup. Dorothy Bowden's grandfather was benefactor William McEchron. Both Mr. and Mrs. Merritt Ames were on the respective boards, as later was their daughter, Celia Ames Barber, and son-in-law William Barber. Their granddaughter, Phyllis Barber Fisher was a board member. These are just two of many examples.

The 1903 annual report stated that: "Joint meetings of the Boards of Directors and Managers were held as often as was necessary, but thanks to the able, conservative and excellent management of the Ladies' Board, the Directors have found nothing to criticize." The male Directors provided the management of finances, as well as functions still not available to women in Glens Falls society of that era, including the making of corporate contacts and corporate fund raising. As we'll see, in 1949 the role of women would radically change. However, the sense of community has never ceased.

Even before the November 1898 meetings, members of the committee were busy researching about homes for the aged and infirm. Some had already traveled to other homes for aged women in Plattsburgh and Utica; Burlington and Rutland, Vermont; and Pittsfield, Massachusetts. On December 3rd Merritt Ames convened the committee again, this time officially as a board, which voted to create the home in "either Glens Falls or Queensbury" and name it "The Glens Falls Home." Although that was and would continue to be the Home's first official name, the early annual reports always mentioned it as The Glens Falls Home for Aged Women, or as The Glens Falls Home for Aged and Infirm Women.

The members of the first Board of Directors were: president, Dr. Thomas H. Foulds; first vice president, George B. Greenslet; second vice president, Merritt Ames; secretary, Daniel L. Robertson; treasurer, James A. Holden; and Dr. Stephen T. Birdsall, Roswell Denton, Charles R. Eddy, Joseph E. Sawyer, G.W. Scott, Jacob M. Varney, Egbert W. West, Clarence M. Wilmarth, and

Charles H. Wilson. Again, just to cite a few statistics regarding board members, Dr. Foulds, a dentist, was an early board member of the Glens Falls Hospital. George B. Greenslet was with the Glens Falls Insurance Company. Daniel Robertson, outside of his many business achievements, was for a long time the president of the board of the Glens Falls Academy. Dr. Stephen Birdsall was the first radiologist in this region. Dr. Foulds would serve as President for 22 years, Daniel Robertson as secretary for 21 years, and James A. Holden as treasurer until his death in 1918.

The Board then voted to cast one ballot to elect the following Board of Lady Managers: Mrs. John R. Loomis, Jr., Mrs. Byron Lapham, Mrs. R.N. Peck, Margaret Bowden, Mrs. Daniel J. Finch, Mrs. Howard S. Paine, Mrs. D.S. Saylor, Mrs. Arthur W. Sherman, Mrs. Solomon A. Parks, Mrs. E.P. Moore, Mrs. Sherman Williams, Mrs. A. Armstrong, Mrs. W.H. Robbins and Margaret Walker. The level of influence was tremendous. For example, Mrs. Solomon A. Parks and her husband donated their home for the first Glens Falls Hospital. Mrs. Paine's husband, Dr. Howard Paine, was the first ophthalmologist ever to perform cataract surgery outside of Manhattan and Montreal. Sherman Williams was the first Superintendent of Glens Falls Schools and later became famous as New York State Commissioner of Education. A small book could be written on the lives of the women and men who founded the Glens Falls Home.

After a third meeting on December 31, 1898, everything was in order. On January 6, 1899, the state's Board of Charities approved the Home's incorporation and the only thing left was to acquire a building. Remember that Henry Crandall had offered his home to be used, but for whatever reason that did not take place. (His wife, Betsy Crandall, may have had something to say about that. Later, after Henry and Betsy's death, their home was razed to make way for another public institution Henry Crandall established, the Crandall Library.)

Unexpectedly, in February 1899, Mrs. Mary A. Conkling offered her own family home and property on Warren Street to be used for the Glens Falls Home, if the board would agree to pay half property's value. The board ultimately agreed and the Conk-

ling home became the first Glens Falls Home. This secures Mary Conkling's place in our region's history as being among the first women, if not the very first woman, ever to make a charitable donation of this size.

Mrs. Conkling's home stood on the corner of Warren and McDonald Streets and the property actually went all the way to Prospect Street. What a historically important site it was, the original homesite of Abraham Wing, founder of Glens Falls and Queensbury. Here in the late 1760s, Wing had built a log house, burned by the British in 1780. Wing replaced it with a second log house. He had begun building one of clapboard, but died before its completion. William McDonald purchased that clapboard home and it was expanded many times. Local histories say that well into the 1870s, the remains of Wing's old log structure could still be seen.

From the McDonald family, the home passed into the hands of Mary Wright Conkling. Mrs. Conkling's gift may have surprised everyone, but according to newspaper reports of the time she had been giving considerable thought to the creation of a home for the aged and infirm. The Home's annual report for 1905 related she had included a provision in her will as early as February of 1897.

However, Mary Conkling had intended for the home to be for both women and men! In wording her original intentions to make the gift, Mrs. Conkling made several conditions, among them that the home be named the Wright Memorial home in memory of her father and that both women and men be allowed to live in the home.

It seems Mary Conkling was a tad more progressive than the board of directors of The Glens Falls Home. Perhaps those with rather Victorian notions of propriety were scandalized at the concept. Board minutes show that the concept was debated through several meetings. In the end, that idea for coed habitation and for naming the home for her father were eliminated, both with Mrs. Conkling's approval.

She also had originally stipulated that, if the Home failed, the property would revert to her heirs, but she changed that to allow the property to be sold and divided among the area churches that

had participated in the establishment of the Home. Mrs. Conkling kept the right of way to her adjoining house and property, to which she moved. She also received \$1,000 in exchange for her home and property, which was actually valued at \$12,000. Mrs. Conkling made quite a financial sacrifice.

To put that amount of money in perspective, consider that Miss Elizabeth Shannon was hired that year as the first superintendent of the Glens Falls Home at an annual salary of \$400. Miss Shannon, a Glens Falls native who lived nearby on Culver Street, had been selected from 14 applicants by the Board of Lady Managers, who also hired a “man servant and a maid servant” by mid-1899. Ms. Shannon spent a week in Rutland, Vermont, being trained by “the matron of the Rutland Home for Aged Women.”

The Board of Lady Managers also oversaw the acquisition of furnishings, “linens, blankets, comfortables and all that goes with a well-ordered household.” A community that gave from its heart donated what was needed, from washbasins to linens to food. By May 31, 1899, members of the House Committee reported, “All the articles needed secured.” This public giving continued. A local chapter of the National Needlework Guild was formed by Mrs. W.T. Marsh, a member of the Board of Lady Managers. The Guild “furnished all our table and bed linen...and articles of underwear as well,” according to the 1903 annual report.

Other types of gifts offer good examples of a generosity too great to list in detail. Mrs. Russell Mack Little, whose husband was the founder of the Glens Falls Insurance Company, had given her very own dining room table, chairs and fruit dishes for the Home. Mr. C.A. Hovey, of Hovey’s Ice Company on Glenwood Avenue in Queensbury, donated ice. Among the numerous donations large and small were two quarts of milk every day (for years) by W.G. Rogers, street sprinkling by O.V. Blittersdorf (we’ll return to that topic in a moment), and free services by local physicians.

Of course, money was needed as well and local newspapers urged the public to give generously. And the public did. The Home helped underwrite its costs with public subscriptions. A person could make a general subscription, or subscribe on an annual basis for \$10.00 or make a lifetime subscription for \$100. In the first

four months of operation in 1898, there were 22 lifetime subscriptions amounting to \$2,200, and more than double that amount of money raised from other subscriptions. In 1901 one person, Mrs. Jane Robertson made a substantial donation that started the Home's endowment fund. Her son, Daniel L. Robertson, followed that with a second substantial donation.

In the early years, however, public donations of goods greatly sustained the home. The first annual report listed every material gift, which ranged from a feather bed to "one pumpkin" from "A Friend."

The Board of Lady Managers, through its Application Committee, was deeply involved in matters of money, as well being responsible for interviewing and approving applicants and making provision for those applicants "unable to make the necessary payments." The 1905 report stated that the committee actually scouted for applicants. It also reported "the Treasurer, *God bless her*, at every meeting gave encouraging reports of money received." (The italics were included in the report.) For anyone who has ever served on a board of directors of a not-for-profit institution, the sentiment is easily understood. And modern boards should note that "fines were imposed for non-attendance at board meetings"!

Independent groups sprung up with the sole purpose of raising funds. A group of women led by Mrs. Sarah Williams formed a volunteer organization called the Willing Workers. In the space of The Glens Falls Home's first four years, the Willing Workers raised \$5,000, a considerable amount of money. To put it in perspective, in 1899 that amount of money could have bought a good-sized three-bedroom home with all the furnishings. The Willing Workers functioned until 1934.

By the time of the official opening on June 26, 1899, The Glens Falls Home had seven residents. Three were from Queensbury, two from Pottersville, one from Saratoga and one from Amsterdam. (Those not from the Town of Queensbury, which at that time included Glens Falls, had to board for one year to establish residency.)

The grand opening was a public event of a magnitude that is seldom seen today. Two thousand people showed up. The event

began at 7:00 P.M. and was simply elegant beyond compare. Holcomb's Orchestra played while visitors strolled the house and gardens. "Russian tea and wafers were served until 10:00 P.M. for all. (And remember that "tea" in those days, meant hot tea, in fine bone china cups, and all served by ladies in elegant white gloves. "Teas" were a Glens Falls tradition that survived well into the 1970s.)

Mary Conkling was given a specially "engrossed" resolution of gratitude while ministers from several of the area churches initially involved in the project spoke on the spirit of charity represented in Mrs. Conkling's gift, and equating it with the work done by Henry Crandall. The original basis of the Home was very religious and the various speeches addressed the concept of the Home as being among the highest expressions of religious duty. In fact, the board was required by its by-laws to start each meeting by "Reading the Scriptures." On a more earthly plane, the interrelationship of the clergy with "those who were" was intense, as churches formed the social as well as spiritual basis for the community.

The Home's residents were at last settled into a home located in a part of town where many wished to live. Today's Warren Street is such a busy, and often noisy, artery into Glens Falls that we have difficulty realizing that in 1899, this area was quite different. From Colonial times, Warren Street, of course, has always been a major route into Glens Falls. In 1899 nearby Finch Pruyn and Company, the Jointa Lime Company, the Peyser Shirt Factory, and other firms made their products. Canal boats sailed within only a thousand feet of the Home and steam locomotives chugged nearby. But the presence of industry and commerce was not quite as noticeable as today.

In fact, the overwhelming impression of the tree-lined Warren Street was of a quiet and elegant boulevard filled with large Victorian homes with spacious lawns and gardens. The only traffic to be heard outside the Home was horse drawn and trolley car. Autos were just coming on to the scene. Brick pavement was only now being extended from downtown. In summer the dry dirt streets would be thick with dust created by pounding horse hooves. Water wagons would sprinkle the streets to keep down the dust, hence

the importance of O.V. Blittersdorf's gift of street sprinkling, done by a horse-drawn wagon with a water tank.

Warren Street from the end of the Civil War to the turn of the century had actually become more and more elegant. Mrs. Conkling's Greek Revival home was soon surpassed by larger Victorian mansions. A national armory has just been built on Warren Street in 1895. To the east of it in 1910, Samuel Pruyn would make a gift of a home to each of his three daughters. The three houses today are the known as the Hoopes, Hyde and Cunningham Homes, the first now occupied by the Unitarian Fellowship, and the second two being a part of the Hyde Collection, the renowned museum of fine art.

Mrs. Conkling died in 1901 and by that time her home had become too small to accommodate the growing waiting list. In that same year, William McEchron offered to donate the cost of a new structure, specifically designed to meet the needs of The Glens Falls Home. The Home's board wished to be in keeping with the tenor of the neighborhood, and so hired architect Ephraim B. Potter. Potter was "the" local architect of the day and had designed numerous private homes and commercial buildings, including all of the buildings of the Bemis Eye Sanitarium on Glen Street and Sherman Avenue. A good example in Glens Falls of Potter's work may be found in the twin apartment blocks on Sherman Avenue, directly to the rear of the Senior Citizen Center, and in the Argent Apartments on the corner of Sherman Avenue and Holman Street. Potter also redesigned the Augustus Sherman Home for Dr. Bemis. It is now the Glens Falls Senior Citizen Center.

While the building was under construction by contractor A.W. Thompson (remembered today by Thompson Avenue), additional space was acquired by renting the Oak Street home of the Rector of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, Monsignor McDermott. *The Post-Star* of October 26, 1961 reported that both "Father Mac," as Monsignor McDermott was fondly known, and "Father Ethier of St. Alphonsus Church were friendly to the new enterprise." (A testament to the love Glens Falls had for Monsignor McDermott was shown when he died in 1903. The entirety of Glens Falls shut down out of respect for him and during the funeral

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the area surrounding the church was a sea of people. Father Mac died the same year the new Glens Falls Home was dedicated.)

The new 14-bedroom building was started in 1902 and completed in 1903 at a cost of \$30,000. The Lady Managers noted that they took possession of the home in January of that year. A huge reception was held that month. Once again the public thronged the home, as Miss Ella Shields sang Veracini's "Pastorale." William McEchron was the featured guest. The local paper noted that he modestly "kept himself in the background," but was "sought out by many," who praised him for his generosity. Speaking of which, it was noted by the main speaker, Rev. George B. Gow, that the endowment fund which Mrs. Robertson had started with her gift of \$500 in 1901 had grown to \$12,000.

From its specially made exterior brick, to its beautifully appointed interiors, the second Glens Falls Home was exquisite. Cherry wood was used throughout the neo-colonial style home. Large fireplaces, elegant staircases, and bright, well-appointed



The second Glens Falls Home, built 1902

(Black & white reproduction of a ca. 1903 tinted postcard)

rooms awaited the residents. The windows were large and the rooms comfortable. The residents had a spacious dining room and a separate library. Still, it was an institution and among the rather stem rules of the day, it was required that the “lights shall be extinguished...at nine o’clock.”

The Home had 13 residents (“inmates”) in 1903. By the 1920s that grew to 22. The Home created its own greenhouse and garden, functioning on land loaned by Mrs. Helen Foulds. Mr. Wallace H. Pierce maintained the gardens, which in addition to producing prize-winning flowers, provided all of the Home’s vegetables “not only for the table use in season, but sufficient for canning purposes. Still, the Home continued to rely on public donations of material goods and services to break even.

The onset of the Depression affected the home. Mr. Pierce’s gardens became more valuable than ever. One of the casualties of the Depression was the Society of Willing Workers, which ceased in 1934. By 1939, things had eased somewhat, even allowing for an elevator to be installed—and none too soon! One of the residents, whose infirmity had prevented her from coming to the first floor for two years, now had the ability to join with others for her daily meals and other social activities.

The next major and perhaps most radical physical change was the installation of two interior fireproof stairwells from the first to the third floor in 1986 and exterior ramping for accessibility. A new heating system, remodeled bathrooms, wallpaper and carpeting were also part of the changes that year.

Funding changed, too. In the early 1960s the Home began to be a recipient of Community Chest (The United Way) funds. However, an even more radical change had actually occurred in the Home’s governance in 1949. In a shift of roles, the board of Lady Managers became the Board of Directors with most of the managerial power. The men’s board was reduced to six “trustees” to oversee the endowment and major capital expenses. Today, the Board is integrated. Nonetheless, the Glens Falls Home continues to be a home for women, still managed by women. Since its inception in 1899, the following women had been Superintendents or Administrators:

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- MISS ELIZABETH SHANNON, SUPERINTENDENT: 1899 TO 1903
- MISS FRANCES LEWIS, SUPERINTENDENT: 1903 TO 1921
- MISS ETTA McNEAL, SUPERINTENDENT: 1921 TO 1932
- MISS MARY ROSA, SUPERINTENDENT: 1932 TO 1963
- MISS BEATRICE McMASTER, SUPERINTENDENT: 1963 TO 1980
- MS. CINDY FREEBERN, ADMINISTRATOR: 1980 TO 1983
- MS. DOROTHY KUBRICKY, ADMINISTRATOR: 1983 TO 1984
- MS. BONNIE NELSON, ADMINISTRATOR: 1984 TO 2000

The sense of community giving that began with donations of everything from milk and fruit, to chairs and tables, to money has continued to this day. Recent gifts have ranged from memorial cash donations to an entire tea set given by Dorothy E. Slavin. The endowment, started nearly a century ago, thankfully continues to receive community attention. Some examples of endowment gifts over the last two decades include: the Glens Falls Foundation (legacy annual payment under the will of Nell Pruyn Cunningham); the Jacob Eugenie Bucky Memorial Foundation, Inc.; the Mary (Polly) Beeman Estate; the Miles Hodson Vernon Foundation; and the Stephanie Singleton Husted Estate.

In the last few decades, the Glens Falls Home has been presented with the challenge of providing for a growing Senior population that can no longer be accommodated by the present Home. The current building has earned its retirement and as the 21st century and a new millennium dawns, a new home is opening for present, and future, Seniors. As with the first Glens Falls Home that opened in 1899, this new Home will also be in the forefront of care for the aged, ready to serve with a century of experience—and always improving upon that tradition.



ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS,
the Centennial Committee would like to extend special thanks
to the following individuals who have donated their time and
expertise to help create this celebration:

- Adirondack Pipes and Drums
- BOCES Students of Bert Weber for the Centennial
Planting
- Joe Cutshall-King
- Sara Cutshall-King and the students in the Photographic
Illustration course at Adirondack Community College
- Richard Merrill
- Bonnie Nelson and the Staff of the Home for all the extras
they have so generously given

Pat Boyle
Chairman

PRODUCTION CREDITS

THIS BOOKLET WAS WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY JOSEPH AND SARA CUTSHALL-KING, WHO ALSO PRODUCED THE CENTENARY EXHIBIT ON THE GLENS FALLS HOME, WHICH OPENED AT THE CHAPMAN HISTORICAL MUSEUM IN GLENS FALLS IN SEPTEMBER 1999.

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JOSEPH & SARA CUTSHALL-KING

THE GLENS FALLS HOME 1899–1999



Bedroom in the Glens Falls Home

[Photograph by Tamar Thibodeau]