Eleanor Clarke Slagle of Hobart, New York

A Founder of the American Occupational Therapy Association

(October 13, 1870 – September 18, 1942)

A self-guided tour of places of interest in Hobart, New York related to Eleanor Clarke Slagle’s life and family history.

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Biography

Eleanor Clarke Slagle was one of six people who gathered in Clifton Springs, New York in March 1917 to establish the National Society for the Promotion of Occupational Therapy, now known as the American Occupational Therapy Association. She was born on October 13, 1870 in the Village of Hobart, New York, which is located in Delaware County. Approximately 400 residents lived in the rural community of Hobart in 1870. The daughter of William J. and Emma Clarke, Eleanor was known as Ella May in her youth. In his adult years, her brother, John Davenport Clarke, represented New York’s 34th District in the US Congress in the 1920s and 30s.

The family moved to Delhi in 1877 when William was elected sheriff of Delaware County. When William and Emma separated in 1886, Eleanor and her brother were sent to live in boarding schools. At times they lived with relatives in Delaware County, including with their Aunt Frances Clarke in Hobart.

Eleanor married Robert E. Slagle in St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Hobart on April 19, 1894. Mr. Slagle worked for the Pullman Palace Car Company. The couple moved for his work with Pullman, living at various times in Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City. When the marriage failed in 1910, Mrs. Slagle enrolled at the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy to train for a career. It was there that she took a course in the therapeutic use of occupations to treat institutionalized patients.

The late 1800s and early 1900s brought about several social and political movements seeking reforms to improve the quality of life for all, including the less fortunate. Many women of the elite class felt an obligation to join service organizations to work for social reforms and to develop programs focused on improving quality of life. Settlement houses, such as Hull House in Chicago headed by Jane Addams, the Junior League, the National Committee for Mental Hygiene were some of the organizations that worked for reforms and provided services to the less fortunate. Many of these programs embraced the therapeutic use of occupations, providing clients and patients with opportunities to participate in occupations (activities) to improve their health and quality of life. The new profession of occupational therapy grew out of these efforts.

When she officially divorced in 1914, Mrs. Slagle was well positioned in her new career. She quickly became a recognized expert and was rightfully invited to attend the founding meeting of the National Society for the Promotion of Occupational Therapy. For the next 20 years, Mrs. Slagle served the new society as vice-president, president, and secretary-treasurer. Mrs. Slagle was frequently invited to give presentations on occupational therapy at both national and international venues.

During the 1910s, Mrs. Slagle served as a consultant to facilities seeking to establish occupational therapy departments, as the director of occupational therapy at the Phipps Psychiatric Clinic in Baltimore, and as the director of occupational therapy for the Illinois Department of Public Welfare. She established the Henry B. Favill School of Occupations in Chicago, the first training school for occupational therapists and also served as supervisor of Reconstruction Aides in Occupational Therapy for the Medical Department of the Army at the end of World War I. From 1922 until her death on 1942, she served as the Director of Occupational Therapy for the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene, overseeing occupational therapy departments in 26 institutions in New York State.

An accomplished and notable citizen of Delaware County, on her death, Mrs. Slagle returned to Hobart, New York to be interred in Locust Hill Cemetery alongside her father, her brother, her Aunt Frances, and other members of the Clarke Family.
A  Birthplace - 284 Main Street

The Clarke Family Home once stood on the northeast corner of the property where the Second Wind Furniture and Antiques is now located. **Eleanor Clarke Slagle, known as Ella May Clark* in her childhood, was born in the house on October 13, 1870.** Her brother John Davenport Clark*, the US Congressman, was born in that house on January 15, 1869. Various members of the Clarke family lived in the house until 1906 when the last Clarke owner and resident, Eleanor’s Aunt Frances, died. Eleanor and her brother John inherited the house. They rented the house out, eventually selling it in 1911. In January 1941, the second floor of the house burned and the house was torn down a few years later. There is an old well located in that northeast corner near the east circular drive entrance. That well, now covered up by a large flat rock and partially hidden by the bushes, is believed to have been the well for the Clark Family Home.

*Note. “Clark” was the spelling used by the family until the 1890s. To avoid confusion, the spelling “Clarke” is used throughout the rest of this document.
B  **St. Peter’s Episcopal Church** – A group of locals met in 1794 to organize the Episcopal Church of St. Peter’s. After much discussion about where to build a church, Pine Hill was finally selected as the location. While the church was built at this location in 1801, construction to complete the interior and various renovations continued through the years. Unique to this St. Peter’s Episcopal Church are the beautiful stained glass windows that were first installed in the late 1870s to honor some early Hobart settlers. **Eleanor and her brother John were baptized in this church on December 31, 1876.** **Eleanor was married in this church on April 19, 1894.**

C  **Locust Hill Cemetery at 140 - 168 Pearl Street** – In 1803, Sarah Beers was the first person buried on the land now part of Locust Hill Cemetery. The Beers family donated land in 1820 to expand the cemetery. Land purchases in the 1800s and early 1900s further expanded the village cemetery. **The Clarke Family plot is located on the eastside of the cemetery in Section A, Lot 27, overlooking Town Brook.** **Eleanor rests there with her brother John Davenport Clarke, the Congressman, and his wife, the Congresswoman Marian W. Clarke, her father William J. Clarke, her Aunt Frances Clarke, and other members of the Clarke family.**

Note: The birth year on Eleanor Clarke Slagle’s gravestone is incorrect. She was born in 1870.
D  431 Main Street - William J. Clarke and Emma Clarke, Eleanor’s parents, owned a home that sat on this lot from 1869 through 1876 when the family moved to Delhi so William J. Clarke could serve his term as Sheriff of Delaware County. **Eleanor lived in the house, that overlooked the West Branch of the Delaware River, until she was six years old.** The original Clarke house no longer stands here. The house that currently stands on the lot was built in 1885.

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E  The Hobart Inn at 645 Main Street – Built in the early 1800s, the Hobart Inn, now home to the Dinner Plate Restaurant, was previously known as the Commercial House and also as Scutt’s Hotel. It was at this location, Scutt’s Hotel, that on January 2, 1862, **Eleanor’s grandfather, Robert Clarke,** was caught in the middle of a fight brought about when some patrons tried to remove another patron who had too much to drink. Thrown to the ground, he hit his head on the sidewalk and fractured his skull. He died six hours later.
Hobart Historical Society at 57 Cornell Avenue - Built in 1889, this building was home of the St. Andrew’s Masonic Lodge No. 289 until 1996. Eleanor’s father was a member of this Masonic Lodge until his death in 1897. William J. Clarke served as master of the lodge, from 1874 to 1876, prior to St. Andrew’s Lodge No. 289 occupying this building. A framed photograph of William J. Clarke was recently found on the second floor of the building among many other pictures and artifacts. A archival newspaper article documents that Eleanor assisted with a Masonic Fair held there in 1890. As Eleanor was involved in community activities, it is likely she assisted with other affairs held here.

Grant’s Opera House at 60 Cornell Avenue - Eleanor was musically inclined and participated in a number of theatrical productions including one presented at this Grant’s Opera House. She was the pianist for the production of Esther the Queen in March 1890. In 1906, she also assisted with a fund raiser for St. Peter’s Episcopal Church which was held at Grant’s Opera House.
Esther the Beautiful Queen Chorus

The New Hobart Hotel (its name from 1906 to the 1930s) at 767 Main Street - since the mid-1840s, this lot has been the location of a number of hotels, burned, rebuilt, sold and renamed. In the early 1900s, the hotel was renamed the New Hobart Hotel. The Woman’s Civic Club met at this location for several years. On December 4, 1934, Mrs. Eleanor Clarke Slagle was invited to return home to Hobart to give a presentation to the Woman’s Civic Club in this hotel. Mrs. Slagle briefly spoke about her work as the Director of Occupational Therapy for the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene. She then spoke about her recent lecture tour to England where she presented lectures on her work for New York State to the Royal Medico-Psychological Society and the National Council for Mental Hygiene in England. Lastly, she described her trip to Gheel, Belgium, where she toured a special community for people with mental illness. The 3rd and 4th stories of the building, once known as the New Hobart Hotel, burned and were removed in 1941. The building was used as a community center until 1969. It is now an apartment building.

The book, A Look Back at Hobart, NY, compiled by James G. (Jim) Meagley, under the auspices of the Hobart Historical Society and published in 2013 by the Hobart Historical Society, and the Hobart Historical Society website (http://hobarthistoricalsociety.org/) were the main resources used for historical information about the various buildings and lots in Hobart, NY.