Anne Higgins Perley was well known in the community, particularly for her charitable work with the Home for the Friendless. She was the president of the licensed home board for 29 years, from 1906 until her death in 1933.

I have an image of this prominent woman riding half of her carriage, from Campbell Street to her mansion, from her husband and later in her own car, to manage the charity home for needy, sometimes orphaned, children and elderly women. Higgins Perley and two

Anne Higgins Perley: Mistress of Greystone

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of her sisters. Carole and Helen Higgins came to Williamsport from upstate New York during the great lumber era, and each married a man who became a "lumber baron." Carole married James V. Brown, and Helen married George Tobias Piper.

Higgins Perley grew up in Wellsville, in western New York state, about 10 miles north of the Pennsylvania border. She was one of six daughters of Edmund Cone Higgins and Margaretta Reese Higgins.

Edmund Higgins, born in Connecticut, was the deputy sheriff in Wellsville. The Higgins family had deep roots in colonial New England. The first "Higgins" appeared in Plymouth and Cape Cod, Massachusetts, in the 1600s. Edmund Higgins was proud of his heritage and was active in the Daughters of the American Revolution in Lycoming County and statewide. She was the state regent of the DAR from 1907 to 1911, hosting the 1907 state convention in Williamsport.

Anne’s sisters

Higgins Perley’s older sister Carole was the first to settle in Williamsport. In 1861, she married James V. Brown, who had been a tailor in Wellsville. He had gone to seek his fortune in Williamsport the year before. He succeeded, and his name lives on in the James V. Brown Library, funded by the Browns, although not finished until 1907, after their deaths.

Higgins Perley’s younger sister Helen came to Williamsport and lived with Carole. In 1878, she married George Tobias Piper, from the family that founded Watsontown. After an ill-timed marriage during the Civil War, Piper joined his father’s lumber business, E. L. Piper and Son, and was elected to City Council. He died only 10 years after their marriage, and Helen moved in with Carole and James V. Brown at their grand home at 239 E. Third St.

Higgins Perley was still living in Wellsville in 1861, when, at age 17, she married George Galloway. I was not able to find anything else about him or their marriage.

According to Higgins family genealogical records online, Stowell previously had been married to her older sister Almira, who died two years after their marriage, at the age of 19.

Sometime before 1880, Anna joined her sisters in Williamsport, moving in with her sister Helen and George Piper on Basin Street.

In 1884, she married the widower Allen Putnam Perley at Christ Episcopal Church in Williamsport, in a ceremony performed by J. Henry Hopkins Jr.

Allen Putnam Perley

Perley had come to Williamsport in 1865 when he was 20 and been hired as a bookkeeper at the George Zimmer planing mills. Four years later, he bought an interest in the firm. Soon he became one of the strongest and most influential businessmen of Williamsport. Dr. John Piper refers to him as "the Peter Herdic of early 20th century Williamsport.

Perley’s first wife, Clara Lovejoy Perley, died in 1886, leaving five children — Margaret, Harriet, Laura, Martha, and Allen. When the 44-year-old woman married Perley, she took over the care of the children, who ranged in age from 4 to 17. Perhaps fearing for their motherless children influenced her decision to devote her energies to the Home for the Friendless. The family lived at 309 Campbell St. before they moved to Greystone, designed by Eber Culver, in 1922.

Woman about town

Of the three sisters living in Williamsport, Higgins Perley was the most active in community life. Dr. Piper has written eloquently about the leadership she provided to the Home for the Friendless (The Journal of the Lycoming County Historical Society, Winter 2013-2014).

She was active in other groups as well, including the Civic Club. She and her sister Carole were early supporters of this club, in which they were assigned topics to research and report on. Carole gave a talk on "William Wallace, the Patriot" in 1897, and she gave a talk on Salem witchcraft in 1901.

Higgins Perley also was a founding member of the Woman’s Club in 1926, and an early member of the Woman’s Club of the Williamsport Country Club. She donated her time and money not only to the Home for the Friendless, but also to the YWCA and other charities.

She also got around. A listing of people who held driver’s licenses in 1917 included not only Allen Perley, but also Anna. The Perleys had a cottage on the Susquehanna above Linden and spent some summers in North Bend, near Renovo, where Allen Perley had lumbering interests.

They entertained frequently at Greystone and the cottages, and these gatherings often made the social column in the newspaper. They also visited James Brown and his brother Stephen, who each had a cottage in Eagles Mere.

Christ Episcopal Church

All three sisters and their husbands were prominent members of Christ Episcopal church. Allen Perley was a vestryman and warden. When Carole died, her sisters donated the sanctuary bell in her memory.

She was a founding member of St. Mary’s Guild. She often took children from the Home for the Friendless to the church, and she arranged for young women from the Girls Training School on East Third Street to attend without any fees.

Higgins Perley and her sisters are representatives of a number of “Williamsport Women” who arrived in this area during its glory time and then made the most of the positions they attained in this “land of opportunity” to help others.

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