

Ida Hays McCormick: Noted community servant

Williamsport Women

by MARY SIEMINSKI

Ida Hays McCormick made Williamsport her home from the time of her marriage in 1875 to that of her death in 1936. She is one of the few women of Lycoming County who have buildings named after them.



MCCORMICK

McCormick's first major gift to the community was the spacious and modern Ida Hays McCormick Home for Nurses on the grounds of the Williamsport Hospital. Prior to her 1900 gift, the nurses were housed in rooms in the attic of the old main building. They lived in dormitory fashion; when one nurse left her bed to return to duty, another took it over.

The year before, McCormick had reorganized the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Hospital — she

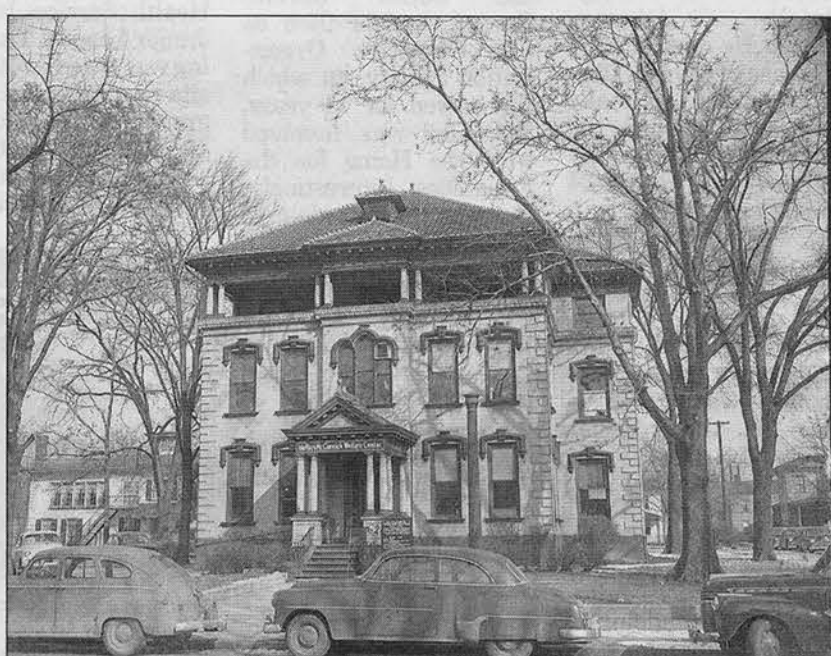


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Shown in this photo, courtesy of the Lycoming County Historical Society, is the Ida Hays McCormick Welfare Center, 620 W. Fourth St.

then served as its president for the next 25 years. The auxiliary's financial support was critical to the survival of the struggling hospital. The auxiliary women hosted dinners and waged funding cam-

paigns, including a gala each December. The gala was so successful that local church leaders asked the auxiliary to hold it at another time of the year, so that it

(See IDA, Page E-2)



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Shown in this photo, courtesy of the Lycoming County Historical Society, is the Ida Hays McCormick Home for Nurses, dedicated in 1990.

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(From Page E-1)

would not lure people from their Advent church services.

Early life

Ida Hays was born Aug. 1, 1855, in Erie. Her father, John Hays, owned a brass manufacturing company. Her mother, Sarah Jackson Hays, was from an influential Erie family. When Ida was 20, she married Henry Clay McCormick, a lawyer who practiced with his father, Seth McCormick, in Williamsport; McCormick family members continue to practice law in Williamsport. Ida and Henry had three children: Nellie, born in 1876; John Hays, born in 1879; and Henry Clay, who died in infancy. They were members of the First Presbyterian Church in Williamsport.

Henry Clay McCormick was very successful in law, politics and business. He served two terms as a U.S. Congressman, from 1887 to 1891. At the time he was elected, he was the only Republican to have carried the majority Democratic Lycoming County. From 1895 to 1899, he was Pennsylvania's Attorney General. He died in 1902 at the age of 57. Ida, then 46, continued to make major contributions to the welfare of the community until her own death 34 years later.

was admitted in 1920, and for many years she served as president. She took a personal interest in the young women, visiting often and bringing gifts. She spoke daily by telephone with the superintendent, Miss Franklin R. Wilson. McCormick was responsible for instituting training in the domestic arts.

In 1927, a new cottage was built — the Ida Hays McCormick Cottage, named in her honor. Each young woman in the McCormick Cottage had her own room and decorated it herself. Admission to the cottage was based on merit.

A scrapbook of newspaper clippings and many photographs from the early years of the Industrial Home have been digitized and are available online on the Lycoming County Women's History Collection website at www.lycoming.edu/orgs/lcwhc.

Social service work

McCormick also was active in other charitable endeavors, mostly in the area of social services and welfare. In 1917, she was appointed to the board of the Social Service Bureau, known then as the Charities Organization Society, on which she served for 11 years. She also was involved with the Home for the Friendless. Interestingly, she was the president of

the Lycoming County Anti-Suffrage Society.

In 1935, she was awarded the Grit's Annual Award for Meritorious Community Services for her "lifetime devotion of services and talents to humanity in general and to the Williamsport Hospital and the State Industrial Home at Muncy. The award stated: "No effort was too great for her to expend ... for which she received no remuneration."

McCormick traveled widely. On a trip in 1922 she visited Algiers, Italy, Greece, Constantinople, Palestine, Egypt, Great Britain and Switzerland. In fact, she died on March 4, 1936, in Charleston, South Carolina, on her way back from the Mardi Gras celebration in New Orleans. She was 80.

After her death, her daughter, Nellie McCormick Cochran, and her grandson donated the family home at 620 W. Fourth St. as a memorial to her. From 1937 until 1959, the Ida Hays McCormick Welfare Center was used for offices for social service agencies including the Red Cross, Crippled Children Society, Child Health Services and the Junior League. The building was razed in 1961; the site now serves as a playground for the Children's Development Center.

The Grit award noted that the self-effacing and

modest McCormick served on committees "not as a spectator, but as a woman to whom the problems of the individuals served were her own."

Sieminski is a retired librarian and manager of the Lycoming County Women's History Collection. Her column is published the second Sunday of each month and she can be reached at

Industrial Home for Women

One of Ida McCormick's many contributions was to the success of the former Industrial Home for Women at Muncy, now State Correctional Institution, Muncy — an innovative alternative to Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, the Industrial Home was cottage style and without bars or fences. The goal of the prison was instruction and rehabilitation. (See Greg Renn, "The State Correctional Institution at Muncy," Williamsport Sun-Gazette, Oct. 11, 2015.)

McCormick was on the Home board from the day the first young woman