

# Anne Higgins Perley: Mistress of Greystone

## Williamsport Women

by MARY SIEMINSKI



HIGGINS PERLEY



PHOTO PROVIDED

Anne Higgins Perley lived with her husband, Allen Putnam Perley, at Greystone, the mansion that dominates Campbell Street hill in Vallamont. Allen Perley, a prominent lumberman and president of the West Branch National Bank, was reputed to be the richest man in Williamsport.

Higgins Perley was well known in the com-

munity, particularly for her charitable work with the Home for the Friendless. She was the president of the home board for 29 years, from 1905 until her death in 1934.

I have an image of this prominent woman riding the half-mile down Campbell Street from her mansion, first in her carriage and later in her own

car, to manage the charity home for needy, sometimes orphaned, children and elderly women.

Higgins Perley and two

(See ANNE, Page E-3)

In this photo, courtesy of the Lycoming County Historical Society, is the Greystone, The home of Allen P. and Anne Perley. The house originally was built by Charles R. Harris in 1890, but was destroyed by a fire in 1893. Lumberman Allen Putnam Perley rebuilt the mansion in splendor. Eber Culver and Son, Architects designed the house.

## Anne Higgins Perley: Mistress of Greystone

(From Page E-1)

of her sisters, Carile 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." Carile 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 Magdalena 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.

Higgins Perley was very proud of her 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 Carile was the first to settle in Williamsport. In 1861, she married James V. Brown, who had been a miller in Wellsville.

He had come 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 Carile. In 1878, she married George Tobias Piper, from the family that founded Watsonstown. After serving in 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 Carile 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 Stowell. 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, Anne joined her sisters in Williamsport, moving in with her sister Helen and George Piper on Basin Street.

In 1888, 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, Fred, Martha, and Allen. When the 44-year-old Anne married Perley, she took over the care of the children, who ranged in age from 4 to 17. Perhaps caring for these 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 1902.

### 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 Clio Club. She and her sister Carile were early supporters of this club, in which members were assigned topics to research and report on. Carile 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 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 Anne. 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 Carile died, her sisters donated the sanctuary rail 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 representative 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.

*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 lcwhc-manager@gmail.com.*