



Historical Society of the Nyacks

Newsletter

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Spring-Summer 2018

Caroline Lexow Babcock, Suffragist

by Katharine Morton Fulmor Jr., granddaughter of Mrs. Babcock



New York State Fair, 1912. Caroline Lexow Babcock is fourth from left.

Photo courtesy of the author.

CAROLINE LEXOW BABCOCK was my maternal grandmother. She would tell me and my cousins stories of our ancestors that made them seem alive and stories of her work that were unlike any other grandmother's. However, she also engaged us in literary, historical, and political discussions. I knew she was different because she didn't cook dinner. Instead, my cousins and I were given TV dinners.

Caroline was the oldest child of New York State Senator Clarence Lexow and his wife, Katharine Morton Ferris. While she was born in 1882 in Manhattan, the family soon moved to South Nyack, where her siblings Morton and Catherine were born. Clarence was a lawyer and in politics, Katharine worked as a social reformer and as a politician's wife.

How did Caroline become the activist reformer that she was? She spent her teen years surrounded by the political questions of the day! Her father headed the state

Judiciary Committee and guided legislation to create the Greater City of New York through committee hearings, which consolidated over three cities and 40 municipalities to create the city we know today. He also headed the Lexow Commission, which investigated corruption in the New York City police department, that contributed to bringing down Boss Tweed. Her mother was known for challenging all her friends with visions of women's suffrage. She acted as her husband's hostess, then, as now, an important job for the wife of any politician. Grandmother always told me that she would watch and listen to her mother hold her own in any political discussion at home. Suffrage was discussed. Her father did NOT support women's suffrage. Her mother DID. Caroline began to question why her father could vote but not her mother. The stage was set.

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In 1900, at age 18, Caroline entered Barnard College, where she met many young women who would go on to change the political role for women from bystander to participant. During those years, she was introduced to Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter, Harriot Stanton Blatch, by a mutual friend, and she met Susan B. Anthony at a suffragist meeting off campus at the Hotel Majestic in New York City.

My favorite story from her Barnard years is about discrimination and segregation. Students at Barnard were permitted to audit classes at Columbia (then a men's college), so my grandmother audited Woodrow Wilson's history class for several days before a sign appeared on the door stating that no women were allowed.

But she persisted in her studies and in 1904 graduated *magna cum laude* with a Bachelor's in Economics, as well as Phi Beta Kappa. It seems only fair that Wilson was the President who signed the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote.

Following graduation, Caroline continued her work for suffrage and other women's rights. In 1904, she founded and was President of the College Equal Suffrage League of New York State. There she met and formed friendships with many of the leading names that would come to work for suffrage. In 1906, she was working with Mrs. Blatch forming The Equal Suffrage League for Self-Supporting Women, an organization that attempted to join professional, college women with blue-collar women, most of whom were labor organizers. Each group was very suspicious of the other and the effort failed. By 1908, my grandmother had become Executive Secretary of the National College Equal Suffrage League.

Mrs. Blatch returned from a trip to England with details on the demonstrating and marching activities of the suffrage movement there, which was founded by British social reformer Emmeline Pankhurst. A new organization, the Women's Political Union (WPU), based on some of Pankhurst's methods, was formed and used to organize women and enlist the support of men, especially blue-collar men. Caroline became the Field Secretary of the WPU, and Mrs. Blatch the President. My grandmother escorted Mrs. Pankhurst and her daughters when they visited New York and other parts of America.

My grandmother never mentioned the hard work she did in New York state and across the country on behalf



Caroline Lexow Babcock, 1914.
Photo courtesy of Historical Society of Rockland County.

of the WPU. She always highlighted the work of others. As Field Secretary she would go town-to-town, village-to-village, door-to-door, counting votes and lobbying. She put up notices of when and where she was speaking by posting flyers and chalking the sidewalks, the social media of the day. Then she moved on to do it all over again the next day in the next location. Her letters home reflected that seemingly endless work and travel. One letter reads that she is sending her laundry home by Wells Fargo. Lest you think that strange, modern day activists also dream of having someone to do the laundry for them, or to be in one place long enough to

have it done. But most of the stories from those years were about the exciting things she did.

I have a picture of Caroline speaking on a street corner in upstate New York. She looks very happy.

In 1915, while still working for women's suffrage, Caroline married Philip W. Babcock. They lived in South Nyack and raised their three children there. Katharine, my mother, was a life-long resident of Nyack until her death in 1990 and a choral music teacher for Nyack Public Schools.

Six months before national suffrage passed in 1920, suffragists were active! Maud Wood Park of the Women's Political Union and others formed the League of Women Voters. Caroline helped organize the Women's Peace Union, which championed an amendment to outlaw war that was introduced to the United States Senate. Ultimately it did not pass, but over the course of seven years, three hearings were held. The second of those hearings is of particular interest to the Nyacks as its speakers included not only Caroline, but also John Nevin Sayre of Fellowship of Reconciliation and Esther Van Slyke, also of the Women's Peace Union.

After suffrage passed, Caroline continued her support for women by working for the Equal Rights Amendment with Alice Paul, an antiwar pacifist, and she supported Planned Parenthood's goal of women controlling their own bodies. From 1936 to 1946 she worked in Washington, D.C., as Executive Secretary of the National Women's Party and also for the Women's Peace Union during that time. In 1968, Caroline joined the National Organization for Women (NOW) and encouraged me to do so. She sent my cousin and me on my first march in

The Nyack Record Shop Project

by Bill Batson, HSN trustee, artist, and writer

THE NYACK RECORD SHOP project was inspired by Carrie Mae Weems, the Edward Hopper Citation Award-winning artist who used collected oral histories in a record shop in Beacon, New York, for her Beacon Project photo series, which explored how rapid commercial and real estate development impacted the African American Community.

At the invitation of the Edward Hopper House, I was asked to create a community component to the Weems exhibit in Nyack. Working closely with my colleagues at the Historical Society of the Nyacks, we felt that Nyack was an ideal locale to recreate Weems's paradigm. We also concluded that the national holiday for the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., on January 15, 2018, was a perfect day to launch our project, since King's assassin was intent on silencing not just a man, but a people. The collection of oral histories seemed to us to be an estimable form of community service that rejects and reverses the nefarious logic behind King's murder.

During and shortly after the week following the King holiday in January, volunteers representing a coalition of arts, preservation, business, and civic groups collected

27 oral histories. We have about ten more scheduled as of this writing. Our interviews were conducted in the window of a local record shop, Kiam Records, as further homage to Weems, who used a similar venue. Being in a store window on Main Street helped elevate the profile of oral history collection.

Here's the significance of this modest start. Before the Nyack Record Shop Project, the Nyack Library had approximately 65 oral histories; of those, eight were by African Americans. Now there are 92, with 33 from the

African American community. According to the 2010 census, Nyack is 23% African American. So, we are now at 30%, a rare example of a social equity number skewing in favor of the marginalized group.

The oral histories that we collected can be heard at <https://soundcloud.com/nyackrecordshopproject>. They are also being transcribed and will soon be available at the Nyack Library.

Putting our life's stories on the record, or encouraging or supporting an elder to do so, is an excellent way to honor Dr. King's legacy. And in so doing, we are making Nyack the kind of village he lived and died to establish, a beloved community.



Bill Batson with Collette Fournier, a contributor to the Nyack Record Shop project.
Photo by Kris Burns.

1977 and saw me become chair of my local NOW chapter's ERA Committee and an ERA missionary in Illinois. In 1980, when Caroline died at age 98, she was wearing the button my cousin Dina brought back from that 1977 ERA march.

My grandmother never stopped. She remains a comforting and inspiring beacon. She suffered defeat and persisted. She personifies the courage and determination it took for multiple generations to secure for themselves and others the right to vote.

For more on Caroline Lexow Babcock, her peace papers are at Swarthmore College, her women's rights papers are at the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College, and her banners, buttons, and flyers are at the Smithsonian

Institution. The Historical Society of Rockland County has some pictures and letters, and a sash and a bag.

For more on Esther Van Slyke, see Message from the President in this *Newsletter* issue, and for more on The Reverend J. Nevin Sayre, see *HSN Newsletter*, Winter 2017-18.



If you'd like to know more about who in Rockland County worked for suffrage, there are more stories in *Ladies' Lib: How Rockland Women Got the Vote*, by Isabelle K. Savell, published by the Historical Society of Rockland County, 1979.

Paul Peabody and His Marionettes

SPRING EXHIBIT AT THE SOCIETY'S MUSEUM

PAUL PEABODY (1931-2002), Nyack's legendary puppeteer, is no longer with us in person but a selection of his marionettes, other handmade objects, photographs, and sketches is on exhibit this spring through May 26 at the Museum of the Historical Society of the Nyacks and in the Carnegie-Farian Room of the Nyack Library. Items in the exhibit are on loan from Paul's daughter, Jeanne Peabody Walsh, and the Historical Society of Rockland County.

Paul worked first as an educator in northern Maine and later took a job as assistant editor of *Fellowship* magazine for the nonprofit world peace organization, Fellowship of Reconciliation, in Nyack. Paul was always creative, but it was in Nyack that his love and dedication to the fanciful world of marionettes and toy making began.

People who saw Paul Peabody's marionette shows between about 1970 and 2002, whether in Nyack or in the many other places where he performed, remember them with a special mix of delight and affection. Children quickly forgot the strings and found themselves interacting directly with the half-size people and animals that had very distinct personalities and expressed very human charms and foibles. Paul was generous with his work—



Paul Peabody, in XXXXXX, 19XX.
Photo courtesy of Historical Society of Rockland County.

after the show was over, he would invite the children behind the curtain to meet each of the marionettes, to touch them, to lift their strings.

Adults too appreciated the old-fashioned craft of making and manipulating the marionettes, which Paul Peabody did so well. He crafted all his marionettes by traditional methods using hand tools, carving their heads from blocks of wood, turning their limbs on a foot-powered lathe he built himself, painting their faces, and dressing them in costumes that he designed and sewed himself. All of his characters have larger-than-life personalities, often gently making fun of some typical human trait. Year by year he added more, eventually developing a troupe of over 90 marionettes who hung on wall pegs

throughout his house between performances. While they hang motionless today, the marionettes were created to perform, to move freely and gracefully, and to inspire generations of children.

The Museum, located at 50 Piermont Avenue, lower level, is open from 1:00 to 4:00pm on Saturdays and by appointment. The portion of the exhibit in the Nyack Library is open daily during library hours.



Mister Tod

Abigail

White Rabbit

Little Dog Toby

Marionette photos by Bonnie Timm

Mary “Mollie” Crawford, a Pioneering Doctor

by John Jaffe, grandson of Dr. Crawford

WHEN I WAS a little boy, my family rode the overnight train to New York City every year to visit my grandmother in her apartment high above East 57th Street. She seemed infinitely old and wise to me then, and she always had stories to tell.

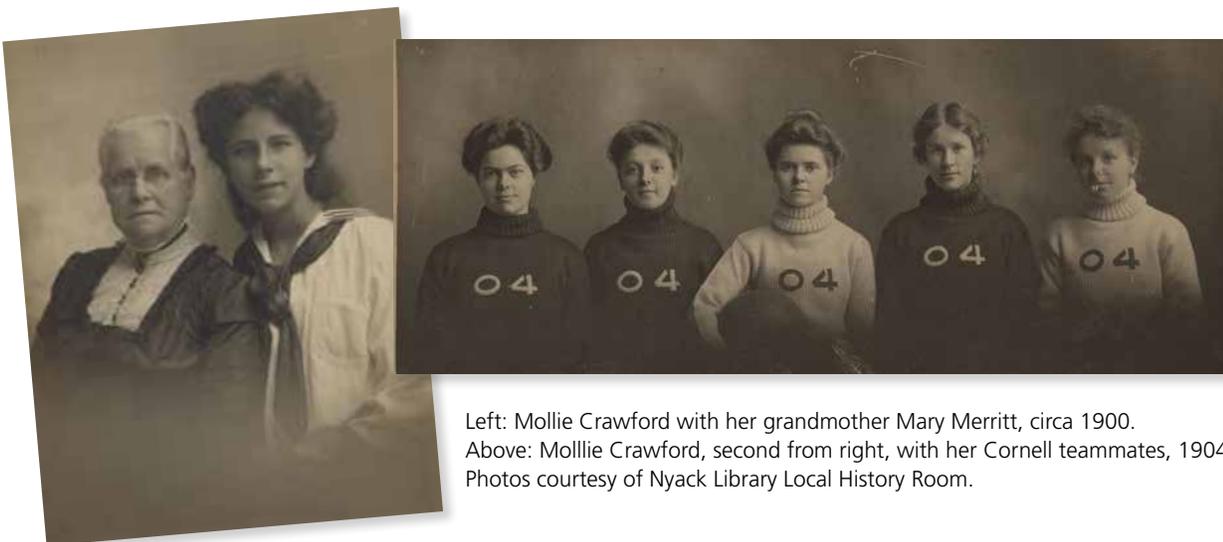
Mary Merritt Crawford Schuster was born on February 18, 1884, in Manhattan. Her father, Gilbert Holmes Crawford, was a lawyer practicing in New York City and a son of devout but educationally progressive Methodist parents. Her mother, Sarah Eliza Merritt Crawford, was a daughter of Stephen Merritt, a successful Methodist undertaker in New York City who lived in Nyack from 1871 onwards. My grandmother’s two older brothers were active and noisy, so to give them space to run around the family moved to a house on the outskirts of Nyack in the spring of 1885. One of my grandmother’s earliest memories was of a snowdrift that came all the way up to a second-floor window of that house during the Great Blizzard of 1888. “Remember the Blizzard of Eighty-Eight, March the Twelfth is not too late!” was a popular slogan of the time (author unknown).

Mollie (who had a first cousin in Nyack also named Mary, hence the nickname to distinguish them) began her education at a small private school near her home, much supplemented by instruction from her parents. In 1895, the growing family moved into central Nyack so that the children could attend public school. Holmes (always known by his middle name) and Sarah were unusual for their generation in that they encouraged all their chil-

dren, girls as well as boys, to pursue higher education and careers according to their interests. Mollie entered Cornell University in 1900 at the age of 16, and four of her five younger siblings eventually followed her there. She not only graduated with honors in 1904, but also managed to complete the first year of medical school concurrently with her senior undergraduate year. After completing her second preclinical year (the first two years of Cornell’s medical program were conducted on the Ithaca campus at that time), she moved to New York City for the remaining two clinical years, earning her MD in 1907.

My grandmother was one of only a few women graduating from medical school in those years, and she faced severe discrimination. Many hospitals advertised their residency programs with language such as, “any man with a medical degree may take the qualifying examination for our program” at such-and-such time and place. But the Williamsburg Hospital in Brooklyn mistakenly used the word “person” instead of “man,” so Mollie took their exam and outscored all 34 men who took it with her. As a resident, one of her duties was to serve as an ambulance surgeon. Paramedics did not exist at the time and many patients were treated at the scene of an accident—suturing cuts, setting bones—and were not always transported on the horse-drawn (!) ambulances to the hospital. Upon completing her residency in 1909, Mollie went into private practice in Brooklyn, and her family moved there to be with her.

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Left: Mollie Crawford with her grandmother Mary Merritt, circa 1900.
Above: Mollie Crawford, second from right, with her Cornell teammates, 1904.
Photos courtesy of Nyack Library Local History Room.



Left to right: Dr. Mollie Crawford about to enter Williamsburg Hospital's horse-drawn ambulance, circa 1908; operating room, Williamsburg Hospital, circa 1908 (Dr. Mollie Crawford is at the far left); Dr. Crawford in Neuilly, France, with a few of the soldiers she fondly remembered, circa 1914.

When World War I broke out in August 1914, my grandmother and many others wanted to help France, though the United States was still neutral. A group of wealthy Americans funded and organized the American Ambulance Hospital in Neuilly, near Paris, and Mollie Crawford was one of the first volunteers to go there in October 1914. She initially worked as an anesthesiologist, but after several months of demonstrating her skills and improving her French, she began performing surgery as well. She worked in France for a year before returning to New York to see her ailing father before he died and to marry Edward Schuster.

After she married my grandfather, Mollie returned to her private practice and to raising my mother, though she also served on committees supporting the ambulance corps in France, especially after the United States entered the war in 1917. Later, she founded and led the medical department at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York City and served

as a trustee of Cornell University. But her year in France early in the Great War remained her greatest adventure. I can still remember the affection and compassion in her voice as she recalled her patients there.

Many of the French soldiers had to return to the front after recovering from their wounds in the same tattered and bloodstained uniforms in which they arrived, but, as she wrote, “. . . the men inside [those uniforms] are splendid, and as patients ideal.” There were memorable characters among them, like Ahmed, the colonial soldier who came in with seven bullet wounds, who had two wives and seven sons in Tunisia, but had never bothered counting his daughters; and Pat, the Irish soldier

who took another young colonial soldier under his wing like a brother; and Moosa, the Senegalese soldier who tore off his bandages so he could pray over his wounds, and who raced around the hospital terrace on a wheelchair. Some could not be saved, such as the soldier who came in with 150 shrapnel wounds.



Dr. Crawford, fifth from left, waving from the *Rochambeau*, leaving with the medical team for France, October 17, 1914 (Library of Congress).

Message from the President

by Win Perry, AIA, Society President

WHEN I KNEW Esther Van Slyke (1896–1993) 30 years ago, she was a delightful nonagenarian full of surprises. Though thin and apparently frail, she managed a huge house and was fearless in taking in needy young people as roomers. She dressed and acted with the style and good manners of her well-bred Reformed Church family and yet was a thoroughly liberal thinker. Her house, at the corner of South Broadway and Clinton Avenue, was built for the family when Esther was a baby by her father, Wilberforce Van Slyke, who became wealthy trading in cattle and land in Colorado and Texas after the Civil War. The family members were proud of their Dutch colonial heritage, but nevertheless Esther seemed rather embarrassed that she had attended such an elite college as Vassar. During the depression, the family investments were badly depleted and for years Esther provided the only steady income to support her mother, sister, and brother. Esther worked for a year as a college teacher, then as a furniture salesperson in a department store, to her mother's chagrin, and, later, as I recall her telling it, was an administrator in a program that provided home nurses. She spoke of evaluat-



Esther Van Slyke on her porch, circa 1990.
Photo courtesy of Aaron Agee.

ing applicants and taking long train trips to supervise.

Esther told with quiet pride of her volunteer work with Caroline Lexow Babcock of Nyack in the women's suffrage movement and the Women's Peace Union. As one of the youngest members of the WPU, she served for a while as its secretary. She wrote correspondence, attended meetings, visited politicians, and traveled as far as South Dakota, all to encourage support of the WPU's proposed amendment to the United States Constitution to make war illegal. One day in 1930, she spoke before a committee of the United States Senate in favor of a senate resolution to adopt the amendment, along with Babcock and three others from the WPU.

Esther was a slightly older schoolmate and lifetime friend of my father, so my wife Betty and I had the benefit of his recollections to help encourage Esther to tell us about her experiences. Esther also gave us a copy of Harriet Alonzo's doctoral dissertation, *To Make War Legally Impossible: A Story of the Women's Peace Union, 1921–1941*, which describes Esther's major role in the campaign. What a wonderful thing it was to have tea and conversation with her on her front porch!

Others survived but could not return to the front, like the four who came in from the trenches in winter with severe frostbite and gangrene, from whom all eight feet had to be amputated. Some had broken down mentally under the stress of the trenches, like those who placed their hands above the parapet so they would be sent back from the front with nonfatal hand wounds incurred by German snipers. Yet others displayed unbelievable courage, such as the English soldier who made his own tourniquet and cut off his shattered leg with his bayonet so he could escape the advancing enemy.

My grandmother and her surgical and dental colleagues worked wonders in plastic reconstruction helping many of the wounded that had disfiguring facial wounds.

Antibiotics had not yet been discovered, but the hospital rarely lost patients to infection thanks to excellent antiseptic practice. As new techniques were developed, the staff rapidly improved their skills. As Mollie wrote, "A war benefits medicine more than it benefits anybody else. It's terrible, of course, but it does."

And the soldiers showed their gratitude. Though she was only 30, they called my grandmother *Maman*. She thought little of this at first, until someone explained to her that to a North African man, there are only two kinds of women in the world: his mother and all the rest. They were paying her the highest compliment they knew. If she was a mother to them, they were like sons to her.

Newsletter



HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE NYACKS

P. O. Box 850
Nyack, N.Y. 10960
845.418.4430
www.nyackhistory.org
info@nyackhistory.org

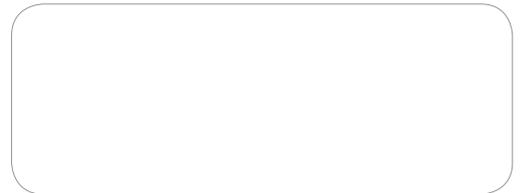


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Design Marilan Lund
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Copy/Proofreading Myra Starr
Contributing Editor Gini Stollendorf



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OR CURRENT RESIDENT

🌿 *Upcoming Walking Tours* 🌿

The Historical Society of the Nyacks Walking Tours take place on Sundays and begin at 2 p.m.
To RSVP or get more information, contact ashapaulose15@gmail.com

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|---------------------|--|
| April 29 | Oak Hill Cemetery (meet at the entrance to the cemetery on Route 9W) |
| May 6 | Edward Hopper's Nyack (meet in front of Hopper House, 82 North Broadway) |
| June 10 | South Nyack (meet at the bus stop benches on the northwest corner of South Broadway and Cedar Hill Avenue) |
| June 24 | Upper Nyack (meet at the northwest corner of North Broadway and Sixth Avenue) |
| September 16 | Edward Hopper's Nyack (meet in front of Hopper House, 82 North Broadway) |
| September 23 | Downtown Nyack (meet at the foot of Main Street near the river) |
| October 14 | South Nyack (meet at the bus stop benches on the northwest corner of South Broadway and Cedar Hill Avenue) |
| October 21 | Oak Hill Cemetery (meet at the entrance to the cemetery on Route 9W) |

🌿 *Attention HSN Members* 🌿

TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Look for an email and/or a reminder sent through the mail,
or go to the membership donation page of the Society's website (www.nyackhistory.org),
where you will find a link.