

Helen A. Clark and Ella M. Clark

National Bank Presidents

By Karl Sanford Kabelac

HELEN A. CLARK AND HER DAUGHTER-IN-LAW, ELLA M. Clark, served as successive presidents of The Pulaski (NY) National Bank from 1887 to 1904. They were among the earliest woman national bank presidents, and one of the few instances where a national bank had two women presidents.

Pulaski is a village in Oswego County in central New York, about 40 miles north of Syracuse. It was named to honor Casimir Pulaski, the Polish soldier who fought and died in the American Revolution. Incorporated in 1832, by 1900 its population was 1493. The Pulaski National Bank was founded in 1865 (charter #1496), an outgrowth of the J. A. Clark and Company's Bank.

Helen A. Lam was born in Oswego County on April 22, 1823. She married James A. Clark in 1845. He was the founding cashier of The Pulaski National Bank in 1865, and became its president in 1884. At his death in 1887, she assumed the presidency, serving until her death on July 22, 1893. Her obituary noted that as a widow, she "lived a quiet and retired life with special devotion to her family."

With her death, Ella M. Clark succeeded to the presidency. She was the wife of Helen's son, Louis, who was then the cashier of the bank. She had been born Ella M. Klock on November 5, 1854, and married Louis Clark in 1874.

Ella served as president for about a decade, relinquishing the presidency to her husband in 1904. At that time their son, Frederick, now in his 20s, became the cashier. She died in Pulaski on July 23, 1931.

An *Historical Souvenir of Pulaski* (1902) noted that the bank was owned entirely by the members of one family. It occupied a handsome building built in 1882 after a fire had destroyed the downtown in 1881. The booklet also noted, "The president has for her private office a handsomely fitted up room, and lady patrons are provided with an apartment exclusively for transacting their business with the bank."

The bank closed on July 8, 1932, a victim of the Depression. The building, though, has continued to house later banks in the village. Today a branch of Community Bank, N. A. occupies the space.

It is interesting to note that Helen A. Clark's daughter, Nellie T. (Clark) Peck, also served as a national bank president, in the nearby village of Mexico, NY. (An article on her appeared in *Paper Money*, issue number 246, November/December 2006.)



The Pulaski National Bank, c. 1905. Designed by Syracuse architect, Archimedes Russell, it was built after an 1881 fire destroyed downtown Pulaski. The bank was on the right side, the village post office on the left. Today the entire building, still looking much as it did a century and more ago, houses a branch of Community Bank.

Sources and Acknowledgments

Grip's Historical Souvenir of Pulaski (1902) was useful for its sections on The Pulaski National Bank and James A. Clark. The *Landmarks of Oswego County* (1895) contained helpful sections on Louis J. Clark and banking in Pulaski. An obituary for Helen A. Clark appeared in *The Pulaski Democrat* in late July 1893 (the clipping is undated), and one for Ella M. Clark appeared in the same newspaper on July 29, 1931. The help of Mary Lou Morrow of the Pulaski Historical Society is gratefully acknowledge. Pat Ellebracht shared research on the Clarks provided to him by Mary E. Parker, the Town of Richland Historian, which was also much appreciated. ❖

Joaquin Gil del Real pens book on Panama's paper money

PROLIFIC PAPER MONEY AUTHOR and SPMC member Joaquin Gil del Real Irizarry pours a lifetime of his original, archival research into his new historical volume on Panama's paper money *Algunos Comentarios sobre El Papel Moneda y la banca en Panamá*.

Readers of this journal are already familiar with the Cuban native's detailed research on 19th and early 20th Century bank notes and scrip of his adopted country. Dozens of his articles have appeared in these pages over the last 15 years, and more on on tap. During this time, the author has also been contributing articles to Spanish-language periodicals. Gil brings his same rigorous study to the present volume, published by Universal Books, Panama in Spanish.

Chapters cover the paper antecedents of the isthmus, scrip of the Central American Steam Navigation Co., bank notes of the

early private bankers of Panama, government treasury notes, notes of the Republic, and an exhaustive listing of laws relating to money. A special chapter "Panama Girl" discusses the use of the *Nina Panama* vignette on large U.S. \$50 Federal Reserve Note backs. All chapters are thoroughly documented by footnotes.

A graduate of the American Graduate School of International Management, and the University of Southern California, Gil has been pursuing the history of Panama's money since he moved there in 1959.

The soft-cover book features excellent color illustrations, historical photos, and extracts of legislation. It may be ordered from the author for \$25 U.S. plus \$3.50 postage at Apartado 0832-00933, Panama, Republic de Panama. Airmail delivery from Panama can take "10 to 15 days more or less," the author notes. -- Fred Reed ❖

